

# **THE ESSENTIAL T. S. ELIOT**





THE ESSENTIAL  
T. S. ELIOT

*A CRITICAL ANALYSIS*

**H. L. SHARMA**



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*In memory  
of  
my parents*



## PREFACE

Talking about T. S. Eliot has assumed the proportions of a new fashion. I concede that my rugged taste has been too rigid to acquiesce in this matter. Hence, when some of my colleagues had insisted on me to re-interpret the creative outreach of **T.S.E.** in some new perspective, I had brushed aside the whole idea as fantastic. Obviously, I did not want to venture into a task for which my reading, then, seemed inadequate.

The present book, however, is the by-product of my doctoral studies. I have attempted here a critical analysis of the mind and work of **T.S.E.** in all its essential facets. My chief endeavour has been to present a systematic study of the principles, methods, and achievements of a literary figure who has left an indelible influence on the thought, pattern and consciousness of our age. In fact, the book is a kind of literary-cum-biographical adventure, which I hope, may better the quantum of **enjoyment** and **understanding** of anyone who is seriously interested in the poetry and poetics of T. S. Eliot.

Amongst those who have made this book possible, my thanks are chiefly due to the publishers: S. Chand and Co., Delhi, for readily accepting the manuscript; to my teacher Dr N. Das Gupta to whom I owe much for my present academic interests; to Principal B. S. Mathur, for allowing me to make use of the college library; to Dr V. A. Sharma; Professor J. P. Jain and Professor Devendra Sharma 'Indra'; for reading the typescript and for suggesting valuable alterations, corrections and improvements; and to my wife for providing encouragement and criticism in the much needed directions, even more important, at the right moments.

can specify and the liability beyond my discharge. I have always tried to acknowledge the sources of quotations and references I have made use of. I am really indebted to all the authors and publishers for permission to quote from their works in copyright. I also acknowledge that the opinions expressed in the book are entirely mine. As for the lapses, if any, I alone am responsible.

The title of the book should not be misconstrued. "Here, in a nutshell, is the kind of creative mind I understand T.S.E. to have been", is what it is intended to convey.

I confess to have invaded the territories of specialists without having the equipment of a specialist. Yet, I have never thought of competing with them. I shall deem my endeavours as amply rewarded, if the book helps in any way towards cultivating a better taste for the study of T. S. Eliot. Even otherwise,

What thou lovest well remains,  
the rest is dross.

Delhi  
January 14, 1971.

H. L. SHARMA

## ABBREVIATIONS EXPLAINED

C.F.	— Compare.
F.Q.	— Four Quartets.
O.P.P.	— On Poetry and Poets.
S.E.	— Selected Essays (1932 Edition).
S.P.	— Selected Prose (Penguin Book).
S.W.	— The Sacred Wood (Mathuen & Co. Ltd.).
T.S.E.	— Thomas Stearns Eliot.
U.P.U.C.	— The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism (Faber and Faber).
W.L.	— The Waste Land.



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## CHAPTER I

### LITERARY CRITICISM BEFORE ELIOT

It is not easy to venture an all acceptable definition of literary criticism. The nature of its rudiments is varied and complex. The areas under its province have always been conditioned by factors which have differed from time to time. The general attitude of each age, the state of its literary development, the maturity of its creative genius, and above all the specific outlook of each of its major critics, go to determine its "own categories of appreciation."<sup>1</sup> The vogue of new assessments becomes more necessary, for the simple reason that no generation is interested in Art in quite the same way as any other.<sup>2</sup> Its more independent minds do not parrot the opinions of the last masters of criticism. They cater to the new demands made upon literature, stimulating thus, the process of re-orientation of the literary values.

The literature of criticism is not small or negligible. Its chief architects, from Aristotle onwards, have often been among the first intellects of their age.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is difficult to arrive at some consensus of an agreed code or set of fixed principles of criticism which may be presented with a view to evaluating the literature of all ages, and of all writers. Still, the basic fact remains the same: that literary criticism with some embarrassing exceptions is a single activity running through Plato to Eliot; that its history is the story of successive critics offering different answers to the same questions; and that while catering to the needs of their respective ages, the critics have

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1. Eliot, T. S.—*The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, p. 109.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Richards, I. A.—*Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 5.

also added something valuable to the tissue and fibre of the general critical thought. Allen Tate refers to the same assumption:

"The permanent critics are the rotating chairmen of a debate, only the rhetoric of which changes from time to time."<sup>4</sup>

Wimsatt and Brooks subscribe to the same analogy:

"The first principle on which we would insist is that of continuity and intelligibility in the history of literary argument."<sup>5</sup>

George Saintsbury, Atkins and Wellek also support the same view. George Watson, however, puts a dissenting note to the "kind of order" these historians have seen.

In the light of this perspective, the total genre of literary criticism may be said to constitute one organic whole. May be, in the lengthy galaxy of critics, the extraordinary critics influenced the course better than the ordinary ones. But taken as a regular phenomenon of growth, the efforts even of the ordinary have got their due significance when screened through the "historical context." Sidney's "Apologie" or Dryden's "Prefaces" might be timeless in as far as they continue to be of perpetual use to the critics of the future. But the value of Thomas Eliot's "Governour" or Pope's "Essay on Man" must not be underestimated, simply because they cease to exercise any ostensible impact beyond their contemporary setting. No serious student of literary criticism can afford to neglect the study of such treatises.

Literary criticism, in the now popular sense, may be regarded as "any formal discussion of literature"<sup>6</sup> which loosely implies three kinds of literary evaluation: the legislative, the aesthetic and the descriptive. Legislative criticism addresses itself more to the artist rather than to the audience. Its main function is to educate the would-be writer to do his job well,

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4. Tate, Allen: Quoted by George Watson—*The Literary Critics*, p. 11.

5. Wimsatt & Brooks—*Literary Criticism*, p. vii.

6. Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 11.

7. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 17.

8. Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 11.

and in accordance with the rules laid down in the standard works of Greek and Latin literature. Most of the sixteenth century criticism, barring that of Sir Phillip Sidney, and a large part of that of the classical age, fall under this category. Aesthetic criticism considers literature an independent art—an activity purely of the mind. It advocates that literature has an end in itself which is completely unfettered by religion, science, morality or politics. Its function is to probe into such psychological questions as the nature of the creative act, rather than the Platonic stress on the nature of poetic truth.<sup>9</sup> Sidney in the sixteenth century, Dryden in the seventeenth, and Addison in the eighteenth, represent this class of literary criticism. Later on, these subjects are treated more elaborately by Coleridge in the early nineteenth century, Pater and Wilde in the Victorian age, I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot in the early twentieth century. Descriptive criticism is the youngest and the most popular of the three forms. It confines itself to the study of individual works vis-a-vis their objects, methods and efforts. This type of criticism has displayed a rare capacity of life and vigour of its own. Dryden's "Prefaces", and Ben Jonson's "Conversations", are some of the notable examples of this type of criticism. It may not base its conclusions on the norms suggested by legislative or aesthetic criticism. A large part of English criticism is influenced by this class of criticism.

Chronologically, the art of criticism in the West goes as far back as the fifth century B.C. It is closely connected with that great intellectual awakening which was heralded by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Socrates and Aristophanes. The 'Frogs' contains the first glimpses of the regular criticism of the Western World. Aristophanes, in this comedy, initiates for the first time, the most valuable discussion on such subjects as language, craftsmanship, morality and merit in art and literature. His inquiries help in the exploration of the hidden and the dormant in poetry and drama. Afterwards, the laurels of regular criticism are shared by scholars of the eminence of Plato, Aristotle and Longinus in Greece; Horace, Cicero and Quintilian in Rome. After Dante in the thirteenth century,

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

the Muse of literary criticism broadens its geographical base; crosses the frontiers of Italy; passes through France; and comes to England. The efforts of the Tudor Trio—Cheke, Ascham, Wilson—in the initial stages, and that of Sidney and Ben Jonson in the later decades of the 16th century, go a long way in laying the foundations of English literary criticism.

Renaissance Criticism, in its general complexion is eclectic and derivative. The Graeco-Roman classicists and Latin rhetoricians provide guidance and inspiration. The stress is on “the curb”—the necessity of submission to a code of conduct both on the part of the writer and the critic. Although obedience to the authority of the classical masters is freely prescribed yet the more intelligent favour the adherence to certain reservations. They advocate freedom and moderation in imitating ancient models, their style and technique. The achievement of Renaissance Criticism is five fold: first, it establishes the noble traditions of imaginative literature; second, it revives interest in the classics of antiquity; third, it ensures a dignified place for the poet; fourth, it prescribes for a regulated creativity based on the models of the ancients; and fifth, it advocates freedom to art and literature, in developing themselves in a natural way, as conditioned by local and indigenous tastes.

The Restoration period marks a new era in the realm of English criticism. It is known for catholicity of taste and broadness of outlook. Dryden, its main exponent, has rightly been called the father of English criticism. It is he who sets the fashion for its future course. His practical criticism has permanent value. He still occupies a unique position. He represents certain qualities that are of perennial interest to the students of literary criticism. He is free and unbiased in the display of critical spirit. He is ever alive to the native sensibilities. He blends in himself the rare qualities of imaginative sympathy, critical insight, and literary skill. His capacity to penetrate and see merits in all literary camps, irrespective of their affinities with diverse schools of thought, amply displays his flexibility in the matters of critical judgments. In an age of new influences of science and philosophy, Dryden

shows a great sense of balance and propriety. He maintains an equilibrium between the local and the foreign; the old and the new; and the modern and the neo-classical. He is great in his own way.

The early eighteenth century shows the height of neo-classicism. This period is remarkable for the expansion and the diffusion of critical strain. The key to this temper lies in the maxim: "Follow Nature", which is interpreted by critics in more than one sense. It is important to point out that the impact of neo-classical traits in England was basically different as compared to the one felt in France and Italy. The most acceptable reasons for this difference are three: first, the influence of Shakespeare and other Renaissance dramatists; second, the patriotic liberalism of Dryden; and third, the wide popularity which Longinian "Concept of Sublimity" had acquired by this time. Even Pope—the uncompromising theoriser of neo-classical ideals—falls in line with the liberal traditions when he declares:

"To judge of Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules is like trying a man by the laws of one country who acted under those of another."

At this stage, it appears advisable to take into account other factors also which are directly or indirectly responsible for the growing liberalism in the application of "those immutable laws of Nature". The influence of Reynold, Hobbes, Locke, Hartley, Beattie and Burke in this connection demands special mention. In the works of these and other men of letters of the age, we note an increasing emphasis on instincts as better and wiser guides than reason. As a result, the whole complexion of Aristotelian Theory of Catharsis undergoes a systematic re-interpretation. The concept of the "picturesque" in art as a distinctive merit, and its emotional appeal, are strongly advocated. The theory of the "Association of Ideas" further strengthens the philosophical base of Imagination as the fountain of great art. Lastly, the growth of scientific spirit and the development of historical consciousness weaken the notion of strict adherence to ancient names and authority. Art as such becomes more dynamic and is regulated by the standard and taste of the national genius.

Thus, the period starting with Dryden and ending with Dr. Johnson, marks an important epoch in the history of literary criticism. The reasons are obvious. First, it highlights an ever-increasing interest in literature and initiates serious discussion on its scope, form and functions. Second, it is rich, both in creative and critical output. Third—and the most significant of all—is the way in which the age, first pre-occupies itself and then wriggles out of the hotly-debated controversy of the ancients versus the moderns, or what is popularly known as the relative significance of “Authority” and “Autonomy” in literature. Ever since the middle of the seventeenth century, “reason” is the watch-word that sways the entire field of literary activity. But in the later half of the eighteenth century, romantic exuberance of the Elizabethans tends to assert itself once again. The change may be interpreted as a sort of systematic reaction against the unwarranted restrictions of the Augustan Age. Till we come to Dr. Johnson, Neo-classicism undergoes major decomposition owing to the pulls of disintegration from within, and the pressures of new ideas from without. The great Dictator hastens this process, though unconsciously, by prescribing certain postulates to the customary laws of Nature. But the disintegration of Neo-classicism is just the negative aspect of the whole literary atmosphere of this era. Even a cursory glance into the popular literary genres of this period would elaborate the view that substantive advances had been made in the directions of the Romantic Revolt which burst out in the early nineteenth century. It would be helpful to quote Atkins in this context who has summed up the whole critical history in the following words:

“The truth is, therefore, that the real progress, the positive and lasting significance of these two centuries in critical history, lies not in the ‘dissolving of Neo-classicism’ but rather in the more enlightened conception of literary criticism that was gradually formed during that process, in the suggestive theories, its varied judicial methods and acute judgments, elements which more effectively than is sometimes supposed, prepared the way for the critical achievement of the 19th century.”<sup>10</sup>

The publication of the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*

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10. Atkins—*English Literary Criticism*, p. 356,

marks the culmination of a new outlook in the development of English literary criticism. Romanticism is the name applied to the new change. The epithet 'romantic' had been in vogue in the continent since long but it assumed dimensional significance through the discussions of Schlegel and Madame de Staël. The two terms 'classical' and 'romantic' have come to stay as distinctive literary schools. Like romantic poetry, romantic criticism also has demonstrated its potentiality, homogeneity and profundity. It opposes all regimentation in literature that left nothing to freedom and Nature.<sup>11</sup> It evaluated a piece of art by its end rather than by its means. Whereas the neo-classical critics judged literature in the light of surreptitious standards such as social propriety or moral purity, the romantic critics started assessing poetry with regard to the poets' mind and its inner working. Coleridge propounds the theory of "willing suspension of disbelief"; Keats refers to the "negative capability of the poet"; Wordsworth speaks of the "tranquillised emotions", while Hazlitt theorises on "sympathetic identification". Till now, literary judgment is more a matter of knowledge than of "opinion." But the revolt unfolds new vistas not of reason, but of imagination. The gear is reversed. The foundations of a new aesthetics are laid where "knowledge" becomes subservient to "opinion" and impressions are made the vehicles of critical evaluation.

There is a fundamental difference between the new aesthetics and the preceding one. The renaissance criticism excepting that of Sidney in England, is mainly humanistic. It is preoccupied with linguistic and rhetorical bias. The Neo-classic criticism which succeeds it, does in no way prove itself better. The problems of language and style still dominate the minds of the critics. The worst of all, rules and not principles, dictate supremacy, authority and veto. The romantic aesthetics promises a new basis of appreciation. The whole conception of Beauty, its nature and sources undergo a radical change. Art and its appeal acquire new colours rooted deeply in psychology, philosophy and metaphysics. The pioneer of the new aesthetic outlook is the distinguished German trio—Lessing,

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11. Kellett, E. E.—*The Whirligig of Taste*, p. 110.



Herder and Goethe. Later on Kant, Schlegel and Schelling embodied the whole philosophy and gave it a subtlety and depth of its own. The list will not be complete if we do not mention the name of Rousseau, to whom the whole romantic revolt stands in allegiance, for providing it an emotional respectability and a colourful originality. Equally significant in this connection is the impact that the changing political map of the continent has left on the human mind. The American War of Independence and the French Revolution aroused aspirations, unexperienced so far. They ignited new sparks of freedom and fraternity which in their turn generated a chain of reaction and even of revolt against the shackles of so called authority. The European Continent became surcharged with an indomitable spirit of inquiry and an unprecedented longing for independence. Art and literature also do not remain unaffected. As a result, the rules and regulations of Aristotle, Horace, Boileau and Le Bossu are questioned. Even the "cham of literature"—Dr. Johnson throws his weight against the ancients when he declares that "no man as yet ever became great by imitation."

The romantic aesthetics touches new horizons of evaluation. It is basically different from all other modes of criticism. In one sense, its primary source of inspiration is Longinus. The romantic criticism is distinguished by its own characteristics. First, it shows a shift from the "mimetic" to the "subjective and the expressive" criticism. Second, it probes into such metaphysical questions as "the origin and appeal of poetry." Third, it recognises the seminal principal of imagination, working at the core of each individual writer and his work. Fourth, it is impressionistic in form and character. Fifth, its very nature is fundamental and creative. Sixth, it is highly philosophical and abounds in psychological bias. Speaking negatively, it discards all linguistic and rhetorical considerations which we see persisting throughout the Renaissance and neo-classic techniques of criticism.

Wordsworth's position as a pioneer and leader of Romantic Revival is universally recognised. The bulk of his critical output is small. In his attack on poetic diction or in his definition of poetry, Wordsworth makes a powerful plea against

what Read has referred to as the "wit-writing" of the 18th century. He is opposed to the neo-classical vogue of evaluating a work of art by the standards of the ancient models. He advances a new theory both about form and content of poetry and makes emotions the core of poetic perfection. His advocacy of powerful emotions either displayed spontaneously or tranquilised through a process of recollection, adds a new meaning to the metaphysical interpretation of poetry and its sources. The glaring pitfalls in his critical outlook are three: he lacks the depth of Coleridge; does not show much proportion and balance; and overstates the possibilities of his concept of "poetic diction." But with all his shortcomings, Wordsworth occupies an outstanding position in the new aesthetics of romanticism. His place is with Dante as far as he makes bold assertions on the problems of language and style.

Coleridge's place as a critic is far superior to that of Wordsworth, both in depth and originality. He may be considered the most shining luminary amongst the great critics, England has produced. Actually speaking, it is Coleridge who under the influence of German metaphysicians, gives to literary criticism a deep philosophical basis. His highest success lies in the fact that he makes criticism a science. Hence, psychology and philosophy now tend to bear great influence upon literary criticism. He explores new horizons—horizons that spring from the soul and impregnate the fountains of inspiration and creation. Coleridge's distinction between the twin terms of "Imagination" and "Fancy", and its further classification into Primary and Secondary Imagination, are the high marks of all his creative philosophy. He strongly protests against the earlier interpretations of "Imagination" which are nothing but mechanistic. "Fancy", according to Coleridge, is more of the nature of a mechanical operator. Its main function is to juxtapose the images. "Imagination" on the other hand has something more vital to perform. It is conceived as esemplastic power, underlying each organic perception. Its main function is to fuse all such images into an organic whole. In other words, the operation of Imagination lies in visualising all things as one, and one in all things. More-

over, Coleridge's aesthetic principles are closely related to his practical criticism. In the absence of this relationship, the bulk of his critical output would remain mere metaphysical abstractions. In his Shakespearian criticism, Coleridge adds new dimensions to the evaluation of drama and poetry. As a critic of fundamentals, Coleridge's place is by the side of Aristotle and Longinus.

Our assessment of the romantic aesthetics would perhaps be incomplete without William Hazlitt. In fact, it is the trio comprising Wordsworth, Coleridge and Hazlitt that directs the new revolution in literary criticism in England. All the three have something to say to one another. In more than one sense, Coleridge remains the uniting-link between Wordsworth and Hazlitt. Virtually speaking, the current of thought running through Hazlitt's criticism shows flashes of Coleridgean metaphysics. It is the striking adeptness of the former that distinguishes him from the latter. Hazlitt may be said to be the fore-runner of Impressionistic creed of criticism. At his best, he displays a rare amalgam of gusto, impression and avocation. At his worst, he indulges in outbursts of personal affront and aspersion. Nevertheless, Hazlitt's criticism does reflect the soul and body of an art in its real perspectives of light, shade, and colour. Some of his reflections on individual poets and their works display his ability for mature judgments in the field of literary criticism. Hazlitt's sound artistic taste in prose may be considered one of the most outstanding features of his personality as a man of letters.

In the distinguished array of romantic criticism, the names of Lamb, Shelley, and Keats are equally important. They also have left indelible marks on the developing process of the new aesthetics. Lamb's critical writings are replete with the similar flashes of confidential and personal notes, as those of *Essays of Elia*. His dramatic criticism is unique. Unlike Hazlitt, Lamb is devoid of any feeling of affront and rancour. The appeal of his criticism lies in the pure genuineness of his impressions on the one hand and the honesty of their imaginative stress, on the other. Shelley's output as a critic is quantitatively scanty but its qualitative impact has been great. His reputation rests mainly on *Defence of Poetry*. The essay,

by its very phrases and terms, echoes the influence of Coleridge on Shelley. Shelley's contribution to romantic thought lies in the fact that he platonises the theory of Imagination and lays stress on the necessary fusion of inspiration and imagination together as the essential basis of creative endeavour. Keats' criticism is substantially based on his own experience as a creative artist. Analytically speaking, the nature of his criticism is introspective. His emphasis on "negative capability" wherein he refers to the poet as the "most unpoetical having no Identity", displays his striking originality.

Looking back at the course of criticism in England, the Romantic Revolt characteristically changes the nature of literary criticism. The battle between the two schools—the Neo-classical and the Romantic—was the battle not only of divergent techniques but also of different tastes. It was a battle between authority and autonomy. The whole of romantic aesthetics invokes inspiration from the German metaphysicians. Psychology and philosophy begin to dominate the creative and critical faculties of the artists. The guiding principle throughout the romantic period is the seminal concept of Imagination. It demonstrates unprecedented outbursts of emotional and imaginative frenzy. The majority of the outstanding critics interpret the principle of artistic creation in terms of imagination. Wordsworth and Hazlitt interlink passion with imagination; Coleridge interfuses feelings and imagination together; Shelley signifies the role of inspiration in the context of imagination; and to Lamb, only the impressions are the impelling soul behind every imaginative activity.

In the process of transition from the Romantic criticism to that of the Victorian period, we find once again, a major shift in the tone of literary values. The reasons are obvious. In the late thirties of the nineteenth century, when Queen Victoria occupied the throne of England, most of the Romantics had passed away. The emotional fervour of the early decades had also cooled down. The spirit behind romanticism, as was natural, had exhausted itself. The rise of democracy and the progress of Science aroused new aspirations, hopes and fears. The faith in God, man and church touched the lowest ebb. In the economic field, the world experienced the worst of depres-

sions. The age may be called an age of contrasts in which authority compromises with autonomy; faith with freedom; wealth with want and culture with philistinism. Darwin's theory of Evolution and other positivist doctrines weakened the romantic influence. As a consequence, the hold of the German philosophers who had provided unstinted inspiration to the romantics, was further loosened. The venue of influence shifts to France and the French philosophy, with its stress on material reality, begins to attract the English mind. Religion and metaphysics cease to be the moving spirit and even the Biblical versions are freely challenged. The temper reflects a sort of protest against aesthetic and moral blindness.

The literary controversies of the Victorian period expose its very character in more than one sense. They bring on the surface, the serious concern of its men of letters with the ethical, aesthetic and intellectual problems of the day. Apart from other things, we find two divergent currents swaying the European Continent. England also does not remain out of the orbit of this development. One current is represented by scientists, historians and writers of the eminence of Darwin, Huxley, Mill, Macaulay and Herbert Spencer; all these and others display their ungrudging adherence to material well-being, scientific development and intellectual independence. The second current runs through the works of Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle, Cardinal Newman, Pater, Symonds and Swinburne. Another distinctive feature of the Victorian literary perspective as compared with that of the Romantic age, is its varied and complex nature. The romantic scene is marked by the simplicity, and the directness of its light and shade. It is pure and harmonious. A certain set of aesthetic rules accompanied by an unrestricted stress on imaginative and emotional exuberance is more than enough to characterise the entire field of literary activity in the period of Revolt. But the colours of the Victorian perspective are not so simple to explain. They are not even homogeneous. They are complex and even show a sort of hybrid growth. Victorian literature and criticism reflect the same heterogeneous mass of complexity.

The graph of the chronological history of Victorian criticism shows a chequered development. It is marked by three

different stages which, broadly speaking, correspond to three periods: the early Victorian; the mid-Victorian; and the later Victorian. The literary criticism in the early period is rich neither in quantity nor in quality. The only names worth mentioning are of Keble, Brimley and Dallas. Their standard of the critical output is mediocre, and sometimes even ordinary. Some of the prose-writers of this period occupy an outstanding place. The writers such as Carlyle, Macaulay and Mill, though mainly thinkers and historians, have something to say valuable, as critics too. The merit of the first two lies in their rhetorical vein and historical sense. Both of them give to Historical criticism a catholic colour and an appealing tone. Carlyle's individual contribution lies in his vision to liberate English criticism from its narrow provincialism and to give it an international perspective. The mid-Victorian criticism is more fertile in output and standard. It is brought up under the able stewardship of Arnold and Ruskin. Both the critics represent the general mood of Victorian compromise in their critical attitudes. They blend together the claims of Art and Morality. The criticism in the third stage shows signs of departure from that of the preceding ones. Pater and his followers declined to accept the moral claims of Art and declared aesthetic appeal as its primary consideration.

The genesis of the whole Victorian imbalance is governed by that basic reality which science and democratic consciousness displays by bringing critics closer to men and matters of the times. As the poets address themselves to society, so do the critics. They begin to think in terms of communicating to the people the "best"—whether written or thought of. But the travesty of the situation is that none possesses either the capacity or the wisdom of prescribing some standard for measuring the worth of art and literature. As a consequence, they grope in wilderness. The Romantics had explicitly discarded the authority of the rules without providing a uniform or universal alternative of artistic excellence. All the same the scientific mind of the Victorians made them love the classical poise and order minus the slavish rigidity of its application. Hence, in literature, criticism, and elsewhere, we find

writers clinging to a line of compromise. The critics seek refuge under the garb of divergent theories.

The clue to the crucial problem is supplied in the biographical-cum-critical method evolved by the French critics, Taine and Sainte-Beuve. The former formulates his theory of literature as the product of three social forces, operating jointly as well as severally. He categorises them as the **race**, the **milieu** and the **moment**. In his opinion, the race of the writer to which he belongs, together with the milieu, the social atmosphere—wherein he is brought up, go a long way in casting his talent into particular moulds. Developed in this manner, the artist, on the spur of an opportune moment, is forced to exhibit his own creative powers. Taine recommends that in evaluating a particular author, all the three elements should be properly assessed by judicious critics. Sainte-Beuve's method is almost similar to that of Taine. He also lays equal emphasis on race, country and the state of society a writer is born into. Besides this, he recommends that the writer's ancestry, his standard of education and the pattern of his youthful associations must also be analysed by the critic before any judgment is passed on his works. Sainte Beuve is seriously concerned about the adolescent period of the author. It is this period which is the most formative and hence, very significant in as far as it goes to develop the real personality of the writer. The French critic qualifies this phase in the life of the author as "the true date of his birth", which, if not ascertained properly and analytically, may lead to gross inaccuracies in the final assessment of his work.

The biographical-cum-critical method, as envisaged above, catered satisfactorily to the needs of the Victorian temper. It suggested a golden mean between the Neo-classical way and the Romantic creed. It promised a dispassionate and disinterested study of an author and his work. It abjured impressionistic judgment. The method greatly appeals to the Victorians because of its twin dividends: it introduced a new approach of objective criticism; secondly, it struck golden mean between classical authority and romantic autonomy. No wonder, if Arnold also readily subscribes to Sainte-Beuve and follows him closely.

Academically, Victorian Criticism flows into three powerful strains. The first is embodied in the critical writings of Carlyle and Ruskin. In one sense, it represents the Moral trends. The second springs from the line advocated by Pater, Oscar Wilde, Rossetti and Swinburne. This approach may be described as purely artistic. Arnold becomes an able exponent of the new direction. To elucidate the point further, it may be said that Ruskin and Carlyle try to harmonise art and morality. In their creative and critical works, they rise in favour of religion and morality and defend them against the onslaughts of science and skepticism. Pater and Oscar Wilde on the other hand, stress on the pleasure-giving quality of art and literature. They adhere to the view, that art in no case should be fettered to any ethical considerations. The two groups represent two different schools of thought. The former clings to the classical ideal of "Art for Life's" sake and the latter stands for the romantic principle of "Art for Art's" sake only. In its ultimate analysis, the difference between the two schools appears to be the difference of two distinctive ends of literature: Teaching and Pleasure. Arnold moves midway between the two ideals. His position is analogous to that of Dr. Johnson who wants "poetry to teach through delight."

Arnold's literary criticism should be viewed from a wider perspective—his social and cultural bias, manifesting itself in **Culture and Anarchy**. He qualifies criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate" what he calls "the best, that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." The definition is of great significance. It clarifies in its various facets, the total attitude of Arnold's criticism. Arnold's critic has a threefold function to perform: duty in relation to his own person, society and literature. The first function consists in "learning the best"; the second, in "propagating it"; and the third, in "establishing a current of fresh and true ideas." The endeavour must be disinterested and must abjure all likes and dislikes on the part of the critic. The way the Arnoldian critic is to propagate is equally important. It should be so regular as to establish a sort of continuous flow of ideas which are not old and stale but fresh and true. The qualifications "fresh



and true" link Arnold with the Aristotelian poetics. In his definition of poetry as criticism of life, Arnold shows the same Aristotelian affinity. But in elucidating his Grand style and the Touch-stone-method, the Victorian critic appears moving more towards Longinus than towards Aristotle. Nevertheless, Arnold displays great respect for the ancients. In his critical analysis, he is generally subscribing to the classical line. Finally, Arnold recommends "real estimate" in criticism, as against the Historical and the Personal estimates. He voices his disapproval of the historical method because of the danger of the shift of emphasis from the actual work to that of the history of the period, and the consequential misjudgments accruing therefrom. By personal estimate, Matthew Arnold means inferences drawn from literary works, merely on the basis of likes and dislikes, leading to a sort of impressionistic criticism of the arbitrary type.

Notwithstanding his drawbacks, Arnold is one of the greatest modern critics and perhaps the greatest of his own times. It is he who tries to set right the deplorable state of Victorian literature. Though he has great love for some of the romantics, yet he rules out their principles. He firmly affirms the need of studying the ancients and seeking guidance and inspiration from them. He is Aristotelian in more than one sense. His greatest achievement lies in curbing the unwarranted excesses of his age. Under the influence of Sainte-Beuve, he incorporates into English criticism, a new ideal and method. His denunciation of the Personal and the Historical estimate as well as his advocacy of the comparative criticism, point to one and the same end, viz., the need of a code or system in critical evaluation. But equally large is the list of sins attributed to Arnold. It has been alleged that he is more of an advocate than a critic. There are critics who openly brush him aside as propagandist, a salesman, and even an advertiser of literature. Some have talked of the inherent contradiction between Arnold—the romantic poet; and Arnold—the classical critic. In spite of such remarks, Arnold's position as critic is still very imposing. "He was", says Prof. Saintsbury, "if not the absolute reformer, the leader in reform, of the slovenly and disorganised condition into which Romantic criticism had

fallen. The things which he had not, as well as those he had, combined to give him a place among the very first."

After Arnold, the Victorian criticism experiences new orientation. Under the legacy of the two outstanding thinkers, Kant and Gautier, the school of "art for art's sake" received a powerful impetus. Once again, Edgar Allan Poe in America, Baudelaire and Flaubert in France and Whistler, Pater, Oscar Wilde, Rossetti and Swinburne in England, become the outstanding protagonists of the new aesthetic school. Antagonised by the Victorian atmosphere, they took shelter under the light of art and thought for curing the malaise in terms of aesthetic principles. This cult of Beauty sways the England of the nineties, and its most devoted votaries are Pater and Oscar Wilde.

Pater evaluates literature in relation to delightful experiences in life. He divides it into two categories—imaginative and unimaginative. Imaginative literature in his opinion has something more to communicate than the mere transcription of bare facts. It presents not only the facts but the sense of facts also. Therefore, a writer whether knowingly or unknowingly engaged in depicting not only the facts but his sense of facts also, tends to become always an artist. Pater also distinguishes between good and great art. The only pre-condition he attaches to the goodness of art is the truthfulness of the "sense of fact." Great art, on the other hand, would depend on the nature of the ultimate end of "the sense of fact." In other words, it must have the power to ennoble and fortify people in what Pater calls the "sojourn here or immediately to the glory of God." It is in this context that T. S. Eliot names Pater as a moralist and not a mere aesthete. In stressing the dignity of the sense of fact, Pater is very close to the Longinian way of importing sublimity of thought into art as the first requisite of its greatness. In the matter of style also, Pater subscribes to the views of Longinus. Declaring sense of fact, the central theme of artistic greatness, he prescribes three means—diction, design and personality—of presenting it in all its charm and beauty. The personality which he calls the "soul in style" is a spiritual activity. It is the very life-breath of the writer's work. In other words, it is his very self that

manifests itself through his art. Suffice it to say, it is "the man" in style.

Pater's basic position is clear. His main concern in literature is with sense of fact and style as the only medium of its communication. The primary function of the critic is to know what the first is and how has it been conveyed to the readers. Pater categorises the functions of the critic:—

"to feel the virtue of the poet or the painter, to disengage it, to set it forth—these are the three stages of the critic's duty."<sup>12</sup>

This virtue of the poet is nothing but his "sense of fact" which may be latent in the content and form of his work. It is the first responsibility of the critic to unearth the same and discern its distinctive feature. Browning's virtue or distinctive quality lies thus in his optimistic philosophy, a faith in life-after-death and the resultant "Immortality" of the soul. But there may be much in his work that does not undergo this particular feature of Browning's quality. Therefore, the second duty of the critic is to disengage or separate his sense of facts from such alien elements. With the virtue thus alienated, the critic's function does not end. He has been left with the third duty to perform: he must set it forth, also for the advantage of his readers which means the critic should be able to locate and mention the source of that impression as also the background of its experience. Pater's critical method is regulated mainly by a thorough search of the delightful or the beautiful in the author—a search which finally demands from us an analytical study of the artist's sense of fact on the one hand, and his way of conveying it, on the other.

Literary criticism implies many modes of evaluation. The impressionistic method which Pater developed is not a new one. It was also tried by the early romantics. Long before them, even Longinus had expressed similar views. In fact, Pater in his analysis of sense of fact is indebted to Coleridge. His interpretation of style as an activity of the mind is Longinian in theory as well as in practice. No one before Pater had stressed so much on the pleasure-giving quality of literature. In his criticism, he tried to harmonise the beauty and delight

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<sup>12</sup> Pater—*Preface to Renaissance*.

within, with the beauty and delight without. Both Arnold and Pater may be said to have refined the literary taste of the Victorian era. Each one of them shares the success of redeeming English criticism from stagnation and raising it to a status which in its own way is worthy of respect and admiration.

Victorian criticism on the whole is characteristically diverse and complex. There appears to be a great measure of uniformity in the literary criticism of the preceding age. But in the Victorian period that singleness of approach is no more to be seen. There is heterogeneity everywhere, criticism being no exception. Something like pure criticism is not easily visible. Politics, History and Sociology often trespass into the frontiers of criticism. Generally speaking, three types of critics are available. They are the votaries of science, idealism and pure beauty. Historically, two new phenomena of this period have great significance. First, the periodical criticism becomes very popular. There is hardly any critic who is not actively associated with the one or the other of these periodicals. Second, it happens for the first time, that University men begin to devote themselves to the study of literary criticism.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the entire field of critical evaluation receives new academic significance hitherto unknown. In the last decades of the century the efforts of scholars such as Lord Leslie Stephen, Dowden, Stopford Brooke and Prof. Saintsbury are of considerable merit. Arnold and Pater show distinction of promise and performance. Both have something valuable to say on the theoretical as well as practical nature of criticism. Barring their endeavours, Victorian criticism is barren and deficient. It gives, more than once, an impression of paucity.

The change of century ushers in an era of a "New Spirit". From the early nineties, a transition is visible which becomes more evident in the very wake of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> The Queen is born in one world; she dies in another. This period is summed up in what Decker calls an evolution from "a

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13. Ellis Havelock—*The New Spirit*.

14. Jackson Hal Brook—*The Eighteen Nineties*.

dogmatic to an experimental spirit."<sup>15</sup> His full assessment runs as follows:

"Between the Coronation and Diamond Jubilee, Victorian life had passed from an agricultural to an industrial economy; from an aristocratic to a middle-class-proletariate society; from a fixed and static to an evolutionary science; from an authoritarian to a relative theology; and generally, from a dogmatic to an experimental spirit."<sup>16</sup>

Prof. A. C. Ward qualifies the new spirit as the spirit of "Interrogation." Love of investigation and experiment now replaces the Victorian attitude of acceptance, compromise and complacency. It prescribes a vigorous examination of the accepted canons of evaluation in life and literature to see whether or not they stand the test of scrutiny. "Interrogation before Acceptance" is the new slogan. Question:Examine:Test, are the watchwords of the "new spirit."<sup>17</sup> The new era of Inquiry is surely propitious for the healthy growth of the critical talent but it is unfortunate that between Pater and Eliot, none is there among the English men of letters who can be classed with the highest creative or critical genius.

In the dawn of the new century, the twin impact of Arnold and Pater is clearly discernible. The spirit of "high-seriousness" of the former as also the "impressionistic zeal" of the latter still haunt the realm of the Edwardian and the Georgian literature. Another important aspect of this period is the further development of academic criticism in England. Scholars and historiographers such as George Saintsbury, Walter Raleigh, Oliver Elton, W. P. Ker and A. C. Bradley share laurels in exalting criticism to new academic heights. The early decades also register a remarkable beginning in the field of Textual Criticism. A long array of eminent writers devoted themselves to the study of classical texts and the determination of their authoritative versions. On the continental plane, various influences appear to be actively working—the influences which further bifurcated the trends of literary criticism in the first two decades of the century. The Arnoldian tradition is represented by the neo-Humanists. They may be said

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15. Decker Clearance, R.—*The Victorian Conscience*, p. 175.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Ward, A. C.—*Twentieth Century Literature*, p. 6.

to be the conservators of order, restraint and discipline. In practice, they tend to oppose two literary tendencies: Naturalism with the debased view of man, denying him free will and responsibility; and Romanticism, with its excessive cultivation of the ego and sympathy with comparatively unrestrained expression.<sup>18</sup> The Neo-Humanists, in the initial stage, include in America, the scholars of the eminence of Paul Elmer More and Prof. Irving Babbitt. T. E. Hulme's position is somewhat different, though he also is as vehemently opposed to "the softness and confusion of Romanticism."<sup>19</sup> The school of Neo-Humanism with its strong stress on morality has led to a charge of "ethical hyperorthodoxy."<sup>20</sup> Yet, many of them tried hard to synthesize "moral earnestness"<sup>21</sup> based on a rational concept of man's nature with "aesthetic sensitivity."<sup>22</sup> Another trend, equally potential, is that of the Imagists in France. This school represents the impulse towards concentration on technique and the precise presentation of visual images. The vocabulary was to be simple but exact; the verse experimental to the choice of the writer; and the subject matter completely free. The powerful exponents of this school are T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound. Hulme is a staunch protagonist of "dry and hard" verse, capable of repudiating the softness of the Romantic poetry. His essential stress in poetry is on solid, clear and plastic images.<sup>23</sup> The Imagists offer examples of the close study of form. In fact, their theory and practice may be said to be the precursors of the Formalistic criticism of the thirties. Both Hulme and Ezra Pound, through their creative and critical originality, leave an indelible impact on the susceptible mind of T. S. Eliot.

The names of two thinkers require special mention here. They are Benedetto Croce and Sigmund Freud. Both of them

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18. Scott Wilbur, S.—*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, p. 24.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. Hulme, T. E.—*The Speculations*.

tend to direct criticism into new channels. One propounds the theory of "Expressionism", and the other advocates the concept of "Libido" in art. The Italian critic defines art as "intuition expression." He asserts that what the people understand by art is nothing but the vivid impression of the artist's mind. It is a sort of copy in words, colours or stones of those impressions which the artist experiences in an intuitive mood. True art consists in the externalisation of these "intuition-expressions." The purpose of the artist is to so illumine the reader or the audience as to induce in them the same impression which he has been able to experience himself. The basic incentive, according to Croce, behind all such literary processing, is the incentive of pleasure. The seamy or ugly aspects, being important constituents of nature, are bound to form an inseparable part of the artist's expression, irrespective of their being useful or otherwise. The primary significance lies in their expression. The names of Lascelles Abercrombie in England and of J. E. Spingarn in America fall in the line of Croce's earlier followers.

The influence of Sigmund Freud, in giving literary criticism, a psycho-analytical bias is remarkable. The complexion of the entire critical movement of the thirties is replete with the growing impact which the Freudian theory has left on the writings of the contemporary critics. The Austrian theorist deals with "Libido"—the unconscious mind. He believes that this "Libido" or what he calls the "sex urge" plays a dominant role in moulding human behaviour. If restrained or suppressed, the urge leads to neurotic effects. The only means of eroding neurosis, according to Freud, is by way of sublimating the sex in art and literature. In this way, art tends to become an expression of the artist's sub-conscious self. The novels of James Joyce and his critical writings establish a remarkable affinity with the Freudian psychology.

The present survey of the literary scene, operating by the turn of the century, amply demonstrates its characteristic diversity. George Watson rightly points out that the three decades between Arnold and Eliot (1890-1920) "defy useful generalization."<sup>24</sup> T. S. Eliot compares it to "a Sunday Park of con-

24. Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 164.

tending and contentious orators."<sup>25</sup> The two powerful critical movements—the Aesthetic and the Moralistic—set in motion during the Victorian era, run almost simultaneously. The Aesthetes, the Arnoldians, the Expressionists, the Naturalists, the Neo-Humanists, the Impressionists, the Academicians, the Formalists and the Freudians—all are in the field. Some of them are vigorously active in throwing their full weight for the development of a new critical movement. No doubt, left to itself, the literary scene in the Edwardian and Georgian period is hardly convincing. Yet, the way different forces are at work, creates a sense of promise as against the feeling of paucity of Victorian age. Wilbur S. Scott's reflections, in this background are significant:

"The main conditions necessary to the development of a critical movement by this time were in existence; release from the criteria of the past; a new body of creative writing worthy of critical attention; and a sense of excitement (not optimism, however) about the future of literature. Oddly enough, the first group of critics who gathered together with common ideals of examination and evaluation were not the *oficionados* of experiment, but the conservators of the Arnoldian tradition: the Neo-Humanists."<sup>26</sup>

And strikingly enough, one has not to wait for long. The void is filled by T. S. Eliot, the poet-critic of the highest rank. The publication of his first book—*The Sacred Wood*—in 1923, marks the beginning of a new era in the history of English literary criticism.

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25. *Selected Prose*, p. 18.

26. Scott Wilbur, S.—*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, Introduction.



## CHAPTER II

### ELIOT—THE POET AND CRITIC IN MAKING

Thomas Stearns Eliot may best be called a "Literary Crusader."<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to "separate his work as a critic from his work as a poet."<sup>2</sup> It is futile and unprofitable, even to speculate how far or how fast he would have been recognised as a critic, had it not been for the impact of his early poems. Indeed, the numerous monographs, critiques and tributes, published during the last three decades are demonstrative of his legendary reputation.

The study of Eliot does not either begin or end with his work. His work as a whole has "its full meaning only in the larger context of the cultural tradition of Western Europe."<sup>3</sup> To understand the development of the critic in Eliot, is in fact, to understand not only the core of Western Culture, but an important part of Eastern Culture also. In this respect, the comments of D. E. Jones are significant.

"In following up the allusions and references in or the implications of his work one is liable to find one reading anybody from Heraclitus to F. H. Bradley in the realm of philosophy or from Aeschylus to Anovilh in the realm of drama. One will almost inevitably go to the Divine Commedia, the Bhagwad Gita and the writings of St. John of the Cross. Eliot is a pathway into each, in that, not only does he provide the occasion for going to them but also an insight which makes them more meaningful to the present-day reader."<sup>4</sup>

✓ Eliot's literary development is closely related to his family environment and the prevailing pulls and pressures of New

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1. Lucy Sean—*T. S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition*, p. 71.
  2. *Ibid.*
  3. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. ix.
  4. *Ibid.*

England traditions. The impressions and influences of his early life have much to say in the future make-up of his mind and personality. He is, in many ways, a typical product of "New England Puritanism in its decadence."<sup>5</sup> His work is no less than a "living and evolving organism",<sup>6</sup> springing always from an obsession with his early memories and experiences. All his works—creative and critical—tend to establish one growing impression—the search for the reality of "human situation"<sup>7</sup> and "the need for significance."<sup>8</sup> Circumstanced as he was, Eliot is zealously concerned with the quest for true "meaning" or "meaninglessness" hidden under the exterior aspect of things. As a consequence, he is always interested in the exploration of "spiritual recovery and integration."

Eliot was born on September 26, 1888, in St. Louis Missouri, a large industrial city. His father was president of an important business concern. His mother was a woman of keen intellectual interests. Both his parents were, however, descendants of New England families of the early settlements. The Eliot family, which was of Devonshire origin, goes back in America to Andrew Eliot (1627-1704) who, emigrating in middle life from East Coker, Somerset, was enrolled as a member of the First Church of Beverly, Massachusetts, in 1670.<sup>9</sup>

Eliot, in this way, inherited strong influences through the background of his parents. Their distinguished scholarship, outstanding commercial enterprise and puritan earnestness deeply touched the mental propensities of the pre-cocious child in his teen-age.<sup>10</sup> "The Boston mind" once so cheerful, now being full of the "sense of last things,"<sup>11</sup> was also imparted to his developing intellect. The "exhausting literary tradition";<sup>12</sup>

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5. Hoskott, S. S.—*T. S. Eliot—His Mind and Personality*, p. 7.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

7. Lucy Sean—*T. S. Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 142.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. xix.

10. Brad Brook, M. C.—*T. S. Eliot*, p. 7.

11. Brooks Van Wyck, *New England—Indian Summer*, pp. 409, 414.

12. *Ibid.*

the "dissolving religious catholicity";<sup>13</sup> and the "decaying Jawry and Christian Science"<sup>14</sup> left an indomitable impact on the mind of Eliot.

Apart from this, the atmosphere in the family included the "extreme form of Protestant rationalism known as Unitarianism"<sup>15</sup> which Eliot himself qualifies as "Boston doubt: a scepticism difficult to explain.....not destructive but dissolvent."<sup>16</sup> This Unitarianism, in his later life, formed an integral part of his temperament. In more than one way, it had a very salutary impact over his expanding intellectual horizons.

Addressing members of Washington University at the centenary of its foundation in 1953, Eliot himself referred to the general outlook of the family and disclosed:

"The standard of conduct was that which my grandfather had set; our moral judgements, our decisions between duty and self-indulgence, were taken as if, like Moses, he had brought down the tables of the Law, any deviations from which would be sinful. Not the least of these laws, which included injunctions still more than prohibitions, was the law of Public Service.....operating especially in three areas: the Church, the city, and the University.....They were the symbols of Religion, Community and Education."<sup>17</sup>

It is apparent that the ethos of Eliot's family was highly moral and religious. The stress on strict adherence to the principle of subordinating personal and selfish interests to the general good of the community, might have gone a long way to mould the Humanist in Eliot.

The literary interests of T. S. Eliot, one may assume, were stimulated by his mother who herself was a distinguished writer. He received his early education in that preparatory department of the University which was named Smith Academy. The subjects, he was taught were the essentials: Latin and

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13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. Smidt Kristian—*Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, p. 2.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *American Literature and American Language*, Appendix, pp. 4-5.

Greek, together with Greek and Roman History, English and American History, elementary mathematics, French, German and English. At this stage, his interest in literature was scanty. He did not imbibe any liking for poetry, till at last, at the age of fourteen, he happened to pick up a copy of Fitzgerald's *Omar* which ignited in him "a new world of feeling." Eliot recalls that experience:—

"It was like a sudden conversion; the world appeared anew, painted with bright, delicious and painful colours. Thereupon I took the usual adolescent course with Byron, Shelley, Keats, Rossetti, Swinburne."<sup>18</sup>

At the school, he came to know something of the classic poets of Greece and Rome, and he very much enjoyed reciting Homer and Virgil.<sup>19</sup>

Eliot entered Harvard University in 1906 and attracted attention as a writer of verse. It was about this very period that he read John Donne for the first time. He attended the lectures of George Santyana and Irving Babbitt. In 1908, he read **The Symbolist Movement in Literature**, written by Arthur Symons which left an indelible impression on his mind and came to him as "a revelation and introduction to wholly new feeling."<sup>20</sup> Speaking of this book, he says, "It is one of those which have affected the course of my life." It was Symons who brought the young boy into literary contact with Laforgue, Rimbaud, Verlain and Corbiere, the French symbolists who radically changed his poetical aspirations.

He spent 1910-11 in Paris, studying French literature and philosophy at Sorbonne. After returning to America, he continued the study of philosophy, again at Harvard. He also received some instruction in Sanskrit; read Patanjali's metaphysics; and experienced a "state of enlightened mystification."<sup>21</sup> It was exactly at this time that he began to read Dante with the help of a prose translation of **Divine Comedy**. In the year

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18. Eliot, T. S.—*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, pp. 33-4.

19. Eliot, T. S.—*The Music of Poetry*, p. 26.

20. *The Sacred Wood*, p. 5.

21. Pinto V de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 182.

1913-14, he was appointed as an assistant in philosophy at Harvard. In the following year, he was awarded a travelling fellowship and was in Germany during the summer before the outbreak of the war. In the following winter, he passed over to Merton College, Oxford, for pursuing his studies in Greek philosophy.<sup>22</sup>

The suggestiveness, idiom and technique of the French Symbolists had inspired new hopes for poetry in Eliot. Having no inclination for the rules of prosody, the classics did not materialise his desire to master verse-technique in English. There was, according to him, no poet either in America or in England who could "contribute to his own education."<sup>23</sup> The only recourse was to "poetry of another age and to poetry of another language."<sup>24</sup> It is in this context that Eliot's stress on Ezra Pound and Laforgue as "technical innovators"<sup>25</sup> is of particular significance. He acknowledges his debt to Jules Laforgue and the later Elizabethan dramatists when he says:

"The form in which I began to write, in 1908 or 1909, was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the later Elizabethan drama."<sup>26</sup>

"He was the first"; says Eliot, "to teach him the poetic possibilities of his own idiom of speech."<sup>27</sup>

Speaking of Ezra Pound, Eliot summarizes the impact:

"What is curious, is his complete and isolated superiority as a master of verse form. No one living has practised the art of verse with such austerity and devotion; and no one living has practised it with more success."<sup>28</sup>

"I confess that I am seldom interested in what he is saying, but only in the way he says it."<sup>29</sup>

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22. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. xxi.

23. Ezra Pound—*Literary Essays: Introduction*.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Williamson George—*A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot*, p. 43.

26. Eliot—*Selected Poems of Ezra Pounds Introduction*, p. viii.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Eliot—in the Dial*.

29. Smidt Kristian—*Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, p. 9.

It sounds paradoxical that Eliot learnt English verse technique from the French poets but the fact that Frenchmen did teach him the craft of verse, gives him another advantage. Obviously, Pound and Laforgue helped Eliot to "liberate himself from the manners exhausted by the Victorian poets and to introduce a new sense of rhythm"<sup>30</sup> into English Poetry.

Some other influences which are easily discernible on Eliot's early works are of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, Baudelaire, Dante, T. E. Hulme, F. H. Bradley and Tristan Corbiere. T. E. Hulme's attack on the "liberal humanist tradition"<sup>31</sup> and his plea for a "dry, hard classical verse",<sup>32</sup> also had an important effect on him. Pinto rightly remarks:

"Eliot has been to school with French Symbolists, not so much with Mallarme and Verelaine, the two poets, who most influenced Yeats and his contemporaries, as with Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbiere, writers who had evolved a peculiar technique based on the use of rhythms of colloquial speech, imagery drawn from contemporary life and sudden transitions from lyric intensity to terse ironic realism."<sup>33</sup>

The poets of the symbolist group wrote poetry of a different type as compared to that of the Georgian England. It was different in its methods. Its imagery was new and startling. It embraced new aspects of life and the peculiar feature of its imagery was that it worked "by association and juxtaposition and contrast of opposites."<sup>34</sup>

It was this poetry which infused new hopes into the mind of Eliot and it was such poetry, he was looking for. It explored for him a new method, suited to his sensibility. But Eliot had never been a theory-swallower. He followed the pattern established by the French poets, but not their multifarious theories. For instance, he perfected their technique and practised the method of "suggestion instead of statement",

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30. Smidt Kristian—*Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, p. 9.

31. Pinto V de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 183.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. Lucy Sean—*T. S. Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 152.

The *Waste Land* being the best specimen thereof. He did not adhere to Mallarmé's dictum that poetry must always be allusive and never speak directly. "Ash Wednesday" and the "Four Quartets" signify the fact that direct statement can often form the highest poetry.<sup>35</sup>

Eliot's task was difficult. In the second decade of this century, he was almost alone. The vocabulary, imagery and mood of the Georgian poetry had worn out. Not only this, it had retained a tone ludicrously out of keeping with the time. The touch with life and its different modes had also been lost. The range of its expression, being limited as it was, could only be made to play a stock repertoire of old-fashioned songs.<sup>36</sup>

Eliot's answer to the poetic needs of the age can be best understood from his three contributions: "Reflections on Verse Libre"; "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; and "The Functions of Criticism." These treatises, the *Summum Bonum* of his early criticism, may be interpreted as laying down the foundations of the whole theory of poetry.<sup>37</sup> His "Reflections on Verse Libre" brings him directly under the influence of Laforgue, Shakespeare, Webster and Tourneur.<sup>38</sup> He defines the verse libre in his introduction to Pound and qualifies it as having the capacity "to stretch, contract and distort the traditional measures,"<sup>39</sup> in vogue. The second essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which may better be called "Eliot's poetic manifesto of 1919," connects him directly with Ezra Pound.<sup>40</sup>

Intellectually, Eliot was a composite product of Harvard, Paris and Oxford. Temperamentally, he was a mystic, given to literature and philosophy. He was also much influenced, then or later, by the prophetic instructions of the Bible and the esoteric teaching of Zoroaster, Buddha and Lao-Tzu. It is not sur-

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35. Lucy Sean—*T. S. Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 152.

36. Lucy Sean—*Eliot and the Idea of Tradition*, p. 80.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

38. Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot*, p. 43.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Smidt Kristian—*Poetry and Belief in the Work of Eliot*, p. 23.

prising that he was also a student, almost a disciple of I. Babbitt and G. Santayana.<sup>41</sup> Philologically, Dante, Baudelaire, Goethe, Bradley and Shakespeare are the writers who have inspired Eliot in his search for a new and effective mode of expression.

Dante inspired him in three directions: "developing and refining" the language of his nation, teaching the lesson of "width of emotional range" and "being European."<sup>42</sup> Eliot became interested in Dante and Shakespeare because both of them "gave" as he calls "body to the soul of language," the one more directly, and the other less consciously.

Eliot was influenced by Baudelaire because of latter's stress on "theological innocence,"<sup>43</sup> on the one hand, and imbibing in his outlook, what he calls "the sense of age,"<sup>45</sup> on the other. Baudelaire's business was not to "practise Christianity" but to "assert its necessity."<sup>46</sup> Eliot pays him the following encomiums:

"The invention of language at a moment when French poetry in particular was famishing for such invention is enough to make of Baudelaire a great poet. Baudelaire is indeed the greatest exemplar in modern poetry in any language, for his verse and language is the nearest thing to a complete renovation that we have experienced. But his renovation of an attitude towards life is no less radical and no less important."<sup>47</sup>

According to Eliot, the true claim of Baudelaire as an artist is not that he found a superficial form, but that he was searching for a "form of life."<sup>48</sup> Eliot's own endeavours in this respect show a close affinity with the French poet. This "form of life" implies the fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric; the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic. Summing up the com-

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41. Durrell Lawrence—*Key to Modern Poetry*, p. 134.

42. *Selected Prose*—Dante, p. 195.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Selected Prose*—Baudelaire, p. 176.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

48. *Ibid.*



mon characteristics of Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe, Eliot asserts three traits: Abundance, Amplitude and Unity.<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that the trio in question has left apparent marks on Eliot's poetic growth, as also on his critical development.

Philosophically speaking, Josiah Royce, F. H. Bradley, T. E. Hulme, Middleton Murry and Bergson have exercised considerable influence on the philosophic mind of Eliot. Royce was an extra-ordinary philosopher—a monist and post Kantian idealist. He held the whole universe to be a part of an all-comprehensive Mind, the *Logos* or the *Absolute*. According to him, loyalty was the greatest virtue of the individual, pushing him beyond himself and thus redeeming him for the complete life of reality. In its ultimate analysis, Royce's philosophy was voluntaristic which proclaims order and surrender as the supreme virtues of the individual to work out his salvation.

It was through Royce that Eliot began to take interest in Bradley. The books which made great impact on Eliot were: **Appearance and Reality**; **The Principles of Logic and Ethical Studies**. Bradley was a disciple of Hegel and Lotze and an ardent believer in the New-Idealism. He does not believe in individual immortality but thinks that individuality is only a passing phase of the final Reality or Absolute as he calls it. Bradley is less of a voluntarist and more of an intellectual. Both of the idealistic philosophies retain their impressions on the mind of Eliot throughout his lifetime, though with some variations.

"Excessive Caution" on the part of Eliot, in dealing with problems of individuality, consciousness and communication, are, according to Mr. Hugh Kenner, the direct result of his study of Bradley's system. Perhaps, even a greater and a far-reaching influence exercised by Bradley, lies in the analogy provided by "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Eliot's stress on the "reality of human situation" and his attempt to discover meaning of the past in tradition is part of his quest for

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49. *On Poetry and Poets*—p. 213.

the individual to integrate himself with the infinite coherent unity of Reality.<sup>50</sup> This search of the "need of significance" in Eliot is an off-shoot of Bradley's theory of "finite centres." According to this theory, consciousness is contained in closed units, complete in themselves and yet united in the Absolute.

Eliot has praised Bradley for his porse which, according to him, is "excellent and persuasive."<sup>51</sup> He was equally impressed by "the catholic, universal and civilised qualities of his philosophy."<sup>52</sup> He had a liking for Bradley because of the dislike of the latter for extreme positions. According to Eliot, Bradley was a man of "vision and wisdom."<sup>53</sup> Eliot feels that scepticism and disillusion are useful for religious understanding and to that extent, Bradley "had a share too."<sup>54</sup> Eliot's quest for knowledge"; his stress on the "need of significance"; and his "concern with the human situation" may in one way, be interpreted as the corrolaries of Bradley's "theory of knowledge."<sup>55</sup> Eliot's use of the imperatives of "is and seems"; the emphasis on "now and ever"; and the references to "time and timeless" constitute the bulk of the philosophic probes of Eliot, which in their ultimate analysis, suggest his close affinities with the Bradleyan logic of **Appearance and Reality**. On the level of critical theories, propounded by Eliot, Bradleyan influence appears more remarkable. His advocacy of "extinction of personality in Art"; "Dissociation of sensibility" and "sensuous perception of thought" in ordinary experience and poetry are just the part of the same thought, expounded in "**Appearance and Reality**."

Equally significant is the Bergsonian influence on the making of the poet and critic in Eliot. The latter came to know of Bergson when he was studying at Paris in 1910-11. Eliot

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50. Lucy Sean—*Eliot and the Idea of Tradition*, p. 140.

51. *Selected Essays*, pp. 406-7.

52. Smidt Kristian—*Poetry and Belief in the Work of Eliot*, p. 16.

53. *Selected Essays*, pp. 406-7.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Bradley, F. H.—*Appearance and Reality*.

was so much fascinated by the lectures of Bergson that he reached the venue, sometimes, even one and a half hours earlier than the scheduled time.<sup>56</sup> His early poetry amply displays the traits of Bergson's "conception of distinct qualities in a heterogeneous world." Bergson differentiates, as does Eliot, between two levels of consciousness: intuition and intellect and it is the first that gives experience of "Reality." According to him, consciousness results from the unison of "perception" and "memory." Perception is the surface reflection of the physical or the matter while memory is the synthetic manifestation of the "sub-conscious" or "life of the spirit." Memory in this context, represents something of an "entity" ever present in the process of evolution. It has no relation to the presentness or pastness of time. Different experiences in the life of each individual constitute what Bergson calls "the components of Memory" which in its turn is sorting, eliminating, arranging and regularising these experiences into an integrated whole. Bergson refers to this "organic pattern" as the *durée* of each individual.

Eliot's belief in "different levels of consciousness"<sup>57</sup> shows remarkable affinity with the Bergsonian conception of *durée*. The "awareness" of Harry in *The Family Reunion* corresponds to Bergson's idea of "intuition"—the main constituent of consciousness. There appears closeness of approach and resemblance in what Bergson describes as the concept of "Personal memory" and what Eliot terms as the "Historical sense."<sup>58</sup> The former sees memory as modifying the entire being of our past and present while the latter visualises a particular phenomenon in History which involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past but of its present also. This "simultaneous order"<sup>59</sup> which, in Bergson, is the resultant product of "memory" at the human level, is practically synonymous with the country's "mind" which is the ultimate outcome of "tradition" on

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56. Smidt Kristian—*Poetry and Belief in the Work of Eliot*, p. 163.

57. Eliot, T. S.—*UPUC*, p. 135.

58. *Selected Prose*, p. 23.

59. *Ibid.*

the national level. In this way, both Bergson and Eliot believe in the continuity of the moments of the past and the present, the major emphasis being on an order, directing as well as being directed, by the spirit of the past and the awareness of the present. Eliot asserts:

“that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.”<sup>60</sup>

In their ultimate analysis, both Bergson and Eliot are philosophising the role of time in the context of human situation. To Bergson, the absolute reality is the present, the past and the future, being intellectual abstractions only. The interminable past and the measureless future are the two facets of the same reality—The Present. Eliot's preoccupation with time displays his basic agreement with Bergson's interpretation of *durée*. Right from his earliest poems to *Four Quartets*, Eliot is developing the theme of Time in various forms. In one of his lyrics in 1905, he is advocating:

If space and time, as sages say  
Are things that cannot be,  
The fly that lives a single day  
Has lived as long as we.

In *Ash Wednesday* he says:

“...I know that time is always time.”

In *Burnt Norton* he stresses:

Time present and time past  
Are Both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.

In *The Waste Land*, the analysis of the concept of time is symbolised in three figures: Tiresias, Lithuanian woman and the Lady of “A Game of Chess.” The first figure shows time as a sequence; the second, as a sort of cyclic repetition embodied by the seasons; and third, as a vast vagueness, unfettered by any direction or order.

Whatever may be the efficacy of the “time-concept”

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60. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 23.

whether in Bergson or in Eliot, it is clear that, to start with, the former provides a plausible philosophy to the latter. But "To be conscious is not to be in time,"<sup>61</sup> does suggest a departure from the Bergsonian concept of *durée*. They show a growing concern with timelessness and imply an earnest desire for finding out the means of redeeming its unredeemableness. It is here that Eliot repudiates Bergson and his theories. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Bergson's philosophy has an exciting influence on the susceptible mind of T. S. Eliot.

Another literary figure and an eminent thinker who had exercised considerable influence on Eliot's work and personality, is T. E. Hulme. Though Eliot never met him, yet reaching London, he found that the literary atmosphere was surcharged with the impact Hulme had left on a coterie of brilliant writers and philosophers. Hulme was a disciplinarian and a classicist. He was a firm believer in the philosophy of "Original Sin" and the inability of man to be perfect:

"A man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary."<sup>62</sup>

Hulme attracted Eliot, first on the literary plane. It was only after the publication of *Speculations* in 1924, that his religious views could cast an impression on Eliot. Immediately before finishing his doctoral dissertation on Bradley, some poets of the Imagist group had focussed Eliot's attention on the hollowness of the Georgian poetry as also on the need of creating a new style. They had aimed at restoring to poetry, its direct appeal to the senses, mainly to the sense of sight by using clear and visual images. The new style was to prune away unnecessary words and abstract terms. It was in this background that a handful of poems written by Hulme, not only made an indelible impression on Eliot but also suggested a model for the new style which Eliot also was in quest thereof.

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61. *Burnt Norton*.

62. Hulme, T. E.—*Speculations*.

Hulme's poetic manifesto is clear from the following observations:

"Poetry always endeavours to arrest you, and make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process."<sup>63</sup>

He continues :

"Plain speech is essentially inaccurate. It is only by new metaphors that it can be made precise."

Hulme is convinced that in poetry "the great aim is accurate, precise and definite description."

He asserts the necessity of a new instrument of poetic expression:

"We shall not get any new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention...."

These and other observations show a parallel development of thought in Hulme and Eliot.<sup>64</sup> Hulme's emphasis on concrete situation; his dislike for the abstract; his belief in the "dry classical spirit"<sup>65</sup>; and his earnest desire to recreate a new poetic expression, suited to the sensibility of his own age are pointers which establish Hulme's claim of influencing Eliot in many ways. They indicate the propriety of Eliot's advocacy of "fresh poetic experiment" as well as his reaction against the prevailing loose standards of taste and value. Eliot's efforts in this direction may be regarded as an indispensable part of an "emerging general state of mind."<sup>66</sup>

Speaking of Hulme in *The Criterion* in 1924, Eliot qualified him as "the fore-runner of a new attitude of mind which should be the twentieth century mind, if the twentieth century is to have a mind of its own."<sup>67</sup> "Hulme", he said, "is classical, reactionary and revolutionary; he is the antipodes of the eclectic, tolerant and democratic mind of the end of the last century."<sup>68</sup>

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63. Hulme, T. E.—*Speculations*.

64. Mathiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 71.

65. *Ibid*, p. 33.

66. *Ibid*, p. 71.

67. *Criterion*, April 24, 1924.

68. *Ibid*.

According to Buckley, Hulme's influence is important in three respects. First, "his views impinged upon" Eliot and his generation; second, they are stated with "great fierceness and in an unpleasantly compulsive tone"; and third, they provide an "emphasis and terminology" both of which entered very early into Eliot's work.<sup>69</sup>

Hulme has also influenced Eliot's critical thought in another respect. The thinkers of the nineteenth century had developed what they called the "theory of continuity." They had tried to establish a relation between "the organic and the inorganic" on the one hand and "biology and religion," on the other. Hulme repudiated such relationship and challenged the existence of any continuity between man and nature. In his ultimate analysis, Hulme came to believe in an unbridgeable distance between "man and God" and hence, an "extreme discontinuity." Therefore, he began to advocate a literature alienated from "man, nature and life."<sup>70</sup>

Hulme seems to regard the doctrine of Original Sin as the guiding insight of Christianity and classicism. It holds, that man is "essentially bad."<sup>71</sup> Only discipline and order can recreate something through him. Hulme, in this context, is opposing Renaissance and Post-Renaissance art and literature, because it displays a disregard for the dogma of "Original Sin";<sup>72</sup> and shows an appraisal of new interest in "man, character and personality."<sup>73</sup> He refutes the cult of personality:—

"The fundamental error is that of placing Perfection in humanity, thus giving rise to that bastard thing Personality, and all the bunkum that follows from it."<sup>74</sup>

Classicism then, paradoxically speaking, is a sort of scornful opposition of vitality, of Personality and of general acceptance of life. And it is here that Eliot's views correspond to that of Hulme. Being a classicist as also a subscriber to the

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69. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 90.

70. *Speculations*.

71. *Ibid*, p. 13.

72. *Ibid*, p. 25.

73. *Speculations*, p. 33.

74. *Ibid*.

dogma that "man is essentially bad",<sup>75</sup> Eliot directs his main attack on the cult of Personality and Emotion in his critical battle against the nineteenth century. To put it the other way, Eliot's theorising on Order and Impersonality in art appears to be a modified form of Hulme's position on classicism and his dogma of Original Sin. As for Hulme's influence on Eliot, David Daiches says something, very interesting:

"For Hulme there is classicism (good) and romanticism (bad); abstract or geometrical art (good) and naturalistic art (bad); the religious attitude (good) and humanism (bad); belief in original sin (good); and confidence in man (bad); hard, clear, precise images (good); and the emotional and soft (bad); fancy (good); and imagination (bad); discipline (good) and self-expression (bad); dictatorship or at least royalism (good) and democracy (bad)."<sup>76</sup>

Suffice to note here that these are the collocations but they explain a great deal of the attitude of T. S. Eliot.

The brief survey of various influences on Eliot requires the mentioning of two more literary figures: Middleton Murry and Remy de Gourmont. Murry, like Eliot, was a mystic. He struggled very hard to find out a foothold in faith. Eliot was fascinated by Murry when the latter was editing "Athenacum." Some of his earlier essays were written under the direct influence of Murry. But the influence left by Remy de Gourmont on Eliot was far greater than of any other artist of the period. Eliot recognises his debt to the French critic who was the first to "bring to light"<sup>77</sup> the contribution made by the French symbolists. Gourmont was a believer in Hedonist philosophy. He had a delicate sense for literary style and wanted a cosmopolitan type of culture to develop in Europe as against the narrow traditions, then prevailing. In the preface to **The Sacred Wood**, Eliot pays tributes to Remy de Gourmont and acknowledges his debt to his critical writings.<sup>78</sup>

Three years—1919, 1922 and 1927—have played a very significant part in the early development of T. S. Eliot's liter-

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75. *Selected Essays*, p. 393.

76. Daiches David—*The Present Age*, pp. 123-24.

77. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. viii.

78. *Ibid.*



ary career. In 1919, he brings out his "poetic manifesto" by publishing "**Tradition and the Individual Talent**" and other essays. In 1922, appeared **The Waste Land**—the "poem of the age."<sup>79</sup> In 1927, he accepts the Anglican church and becomes a British subject. It is again in 1922, that the literary world finds a talented critic in Eliot who begins editing the famous literary review—**The Criterion**. The contacts which he has developed during his tenureship as editor of this review, lasting upto 1939, proved very fruitful to him. His critical writings diversified as they are, go a long way in establishing the reputation of Eliot as a critic. Not only this, the change from 1919 to 1927 is, in itself, a great change. It marks a new era, a new promise and a new performance. In 1919, the critic in Eliot was referring to "the integrity and autonomy of poetry."<sup>80</sup> In 1927, he started discussion on the problem of the "relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and of other times."<sup>81</sup>

The manner and the matter of Eliot's early poetry and criticism is not a mere accident. They are the echoes of the cumulative influence of the age, environment and education in which Eliot's sensitive, catholic and intellectual personality was developed. The greatness of his early poetry lies in the "vision of the age", he has pictured therein. The ordeal, he dedicated himself to, was not of a small magnitude. The falling literary standards had thrown out a challenge. The tone, temper and technique of poetry demanded a radical change. The rituals and rudiments of criticism needed re-orientation. Not only had Eliot understood the nature of the literary mission he was asked to accomplish, he had also shown the necessary will and training by studying closely to the works of Bradley, Laforgue, Pound, Baudelaire, Bergson and Hulme.

Moreover the poet and critic in T. S. Eliot was a simultaneous growth. His criticism and his poetry, his precept and

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79. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*.

80. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, Preface.

81. Eliot, T. S.—*The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, Introduction.

his practice, are interdependent and complementary to each other.<sup>82</sup> "His earlier criticism", to put in Eliot's own language "is a by-product of his private poetry workshop."<sup>83</sup>

Speaking of the indispensability of Pound's critical writings, what Eliot spoke of him, holds equally true in his own case:

"They began at a moment when they were very much needed: the situation of poetry in 1909 or 1910 was stagnant to a degree difficult for any young poet of today to imagine. Pound himself had a long way to go: and he has gone it."<sup>84</sup>

Eliot, in his literary criticism, may have been inspired by the triple mission he decided to work out: to review the past of literature; to set the poets and the poems in a new order;<sup>85</sup> and to correct taste.<sup>86</sup> However, George Watson has noticed three voices in T. S. Eliot, the critic:

"These then, are the three voices of Eliot the critic: first, the youthful, exploratory enthusiasm of the Twenties, where, an almost ideal balance between poetic and critical activity is realised; second, an abortive career of social and religious advocacy in frankly obscurantist causes; and third, a bold but exhausted attempt to recover the creative urge, followed at once by denial and desperation."<sup>87</sup>

But irrespective of any such analogy, we should bear in mind the two basic aspects of Eliot's literary criticism: first, his criticism and poetry compose a single "oeuvre",<sup>88</sup> and second, his whole work, as he once noted of Shakespeare's, is in important respects, "one continuous poem."<sup>89</sup>

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82. Brad Brook, M. C.—C. F. B. Rajan's—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*.

83. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 106.

84. Eliot, T. S.—Introduction: *Literary Essays of Pound*, p. xiii.

85. Eliot, T. S.—*U.P.U.C. Arnold*, p. 108.

86. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 18.

87. Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 195.

88. Eliot, T. S.—Introduction: *Literary Essays of Pound*, p. xiii.

89. Kenner Hugh—*T. S. Eliot: Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 13.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CRITIC IN THE TWENTIES

A simple codification of the principles and methods of T. S. Eliot's criticism is not possible. It is because, he is not a literary legislator in the sense Aristotle is considered to be. He does not even dictate as does Dr. Johnson. Unlike Sidney, Eliot does not theorise on the Cult of Poetry. His place is different. He is pre-occupied to create in criticism a new method, more as an initiator than as an inventor. The body of his literary opinions may be compounded from the scattered pronouncements of his prose writings. As a critic, Eliot has his own limitations. He is neither a theoretician of art nor a critic of fundamentals. His criticism is not purely academic; nor is it in any way dogmatic. His love for details; his precision in judgment; and his flexibility to change his mind and ground have rightly installed him at the position of "one of the best arbiters of taste"<sup>1</sup> of our present generations.

Before attempting to analyse the critical efforts of T. S. Eliot in the Twenties, we must bear in mind some of the salient features of his criticism. First, it is significant that in criticism as in poetry, Eliot is the first exponent to give expression to the spirit of his age. Second, what Eliot writes about poetry must be assessed in relation to the poetry he composes. Third, the impact of Eliot's criticism, as also of his poetry, is full of what Eliot himself spoke of Pound's criticism: the "historical perspective."<sup>2</sup> It is through *The Waste Land*, that the elite proclaims him "the poet of the age." And it is by means of

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1. Smidt Kristian—*Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, p. 36.

2. Eliot, T. S.—*Introduction to the Literary Essays of Pound*, p. x.

Reflections on Verse Libre (1917); **Tradition and the Individual Talent** (1919); and **The Functions of Criticism** (1923); that the world became acquainted with Eliot's literary credo. This trio of prose essays forms the main plank of those principles and methods which he sets out to uphold in criticism. In them, we can visualise the whole content of his critical thought and practice. Fourth, it has been said that Eliot speaks with three voices in criticism:<sup>3</sup> the one representing the critic in the Twenties; the second coming out of the humanist in the Thirties; and the third signifying the sobriety of the rationalist in the last phase. But, whatever be the logic, there is still an underlying synthesis of the same outlook manifesting itself in each voice. His literary career possesses an essential unity.<sup>4</sup> In this context, it is of vital importance that Eliot's critical mind displays an organic growth of maturity, flexibility and understanding. In spite of some inconsistencies and contradictions in his opinions, there appears to be present, a well sustained and moderately defined current of values in the entire body of his criticism. The way Eliot modified his judgments in relation to Arnold, Milton and Kipling, amply substantiates this point of view. Fifth, Eliot's literary effort is directed by a firm belief in the "creative" and "critical" faculties, working simultaneously in the artist. He maintains that "there is a significant relation between the best poetry and the best criticism of the same period."<sup>5</sup> According to him, the age of criticism is also the age of critical poetry.

Lastly, Eliot is a critic of poise and order. He embodies a constructive attitude towards the problems of art and literature. He stands for the ideal of objective criticism of the work rather than of the writer. His efforts are directed to "bring the poet back to life." He means the poetry and not the man. No doubt, he spearheads the attack on the "old order" of the Victorian and Georgian literature, he has never

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3. Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 195.

4. Brooks Cleanth—*Eliot: Thinker and Artist*. C. F. Eliot—*The Man and His Work*, p. 316.

5. Eliot, T. S.—*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 30.

advocated disorder as was misconstrued and misinterpreted in certain quarters. In fact, he happens to be the teacher of a new order which envisages a stricter discipline as compared to that of the old order.

His opposition to Romanticism and Victorianism is inspired by the twin ideals of his literary criticism: objectivity and order. He voices his strong reaction against the gross emotionalism of the romanticists, their rule-lessness and sheer private judgments of "meeting by oneself in one's own house."<sup>6</sup> He is opposed to most of the Victorians because of their sense of complacency; love for status-quo; and lack of sensitiveness to poetic values. He carries a tirade against the Georgian literature because it is moribund, dead, and unrealistic. The whole climate of the period prior to him, rebounds with sterility and lack of reality, unprecedented before.

Eliot calls the romantic generation as "belonging to the numbers of the great heretics of all times."<sup>7</sup> He charges them on three counts. First, they failed to distinguish what Prof. Richards suggests in *Science and Poetry* "intuition of an emotion from an intuition by it."<sup>8</sup> Second, they philosophised their own poetic insight rather than used it. Third, their faults and limitations cannot be separated from their greatness. Eliot shows his dislike for "Keats' egotism,"<sup>9</sup> but calls it "that of youth which time would have redeemed."<sup>10</sup> He blames Shelley for borrowing "shabby ideals"<sup>11</sup> and then "muddling them up with his own intuition."<sup>12</sup> He argues further that his positive dislike for some of Shelley's views "hampers enjoyment of the poems in which they occur."<sup>13</sup> "What complicates the problem still further": says Eliot, "is that in poetry so fluent as Shelley's, there is a good deal which is just bad

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6. Saintsbury—*A Short History of English Criticism*, p. 413.

7. Eliot, T. S.—*U.P.U.C.*, p. 100.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

jingling."<sup>14</sup> Finally, he alleges that Shelley is an "eighteenth century rationalist and a cloudy Platonist."<sup>15</sup>

Eliot refers to the criticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge as "the criticism of an age of change."<sup>16</sup> He calls the two critics "just as eighteenth century as anybody"<sup>17</sup> in their appraisal of John Donne, except that, where the eighteenth century critics spoke of lack of elegance, the Lake poets found lack of passion. He continues:

"much of the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge is just as turgid and artificial and elegant as any eighteenth century die-hard could wish."<sup>18</sup>

Eliot attacks the theory of "Willing suspension of disbelief" and asserts that though Coleridge points out an important fact, yet not "quite in the happiest terms."<sup>19</sup> He is of the opinion that if one is reading well, the question of belief and disbelief in the intellectual sense, never arises: He suggests:

"If unfortunately, it does arise, either through the poet's fault or our own, we have for the moment ceased to be reading and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in quite a different type of activity."<sup>20</sup>

He also raises strong objections against Poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" and says, "it will not do to talk of, which is only one poet's account of his recollection of his own methods."<sup>21</sup> Speaking of the metaphysical interests of Coleridge in his literary criticism, Eliot qualifies it as "an affair of his emotions";<sup>22</sup> which, in its ultimate analysis, blurs critical faculty and directs Coleridge "into a metaphysical hare and hounds."<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, the centre of interest

14. Eliot, T. S.—*U.P.U.C.*, p. 91.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

21. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, preface, p. ix.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

23. *The Sacred Wood*, p. 13.

changes and the critic is lost in something else which can neither be the work of art; nor can it bring its enjoyment. According to Eliot, this is a great drawback in Coleridge which results from the "pernicious effect of emotion."<sup>24</sup> Hence, Eliot remarks that Coleridge is more philosophic than Aristotle but in the derogatory sense.<sup>25</sup>

Among the Victorians, it is Arnold who has to face the brunt of his attacks. He refers to Arnold as belonging to a "period of stasis."<sup>26</sup> Secondly, he lacks vision and imagination and "hardly looks ahead to the new stage of experience."<sup>27</sup> Thirdly, though he speaks of discipline, it is the discipline of culture and not the "discipline of suffering."<sup>28</sup> Eliot refers to the limited range of Arnold's poetic insight. He picks up one of his commendatory remarks for Burns which said, "no one can deny that it is of advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world", and retorts:—

"But the essential advantage for a poet is not, to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom and the horror and the glory."<sup>29</sup>

But Eliot adds:—

"The vision of the horror and the glory was denied to Arnold but he knew something of the boredom."<sup>30</sup>

According to Eliot, Arnold's taste is not comprehensive. Arnoldian criticism of the Romantic poets, says Eliot, is "tinged by his own uncertainty, his own apprehensions and his own beliefs", and it is very much influenced by his own religious attitude.<sup>31</sup> Apart from this, Eliot objects to the Arnoldian method in criticism and alleges that it lacks the precision of Johnson and makes his critical judgments "too reflective, too

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24. *The Sacred Wood*, p. 13.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Eliot, T. S.—*U.P.U.C.*, p. 103.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

ruminative to rise ever to the first-rank."<sup>32</sup>

At this stage, it appears necessary to correct a misgiving which may arise from the present discussion. Eliot is not all opposition to the Romantics and the Victorians. What he is opposed to, is their vagueness and emotionalism. He criticises the romantics because they are driven to judge by their fading inner lights alone. Naturally, Eliot given to objectivity and order as he is, exposes the sham in them.

Eliot's assessment of the preceding critics is not biased. His endeavours appear to be motivated by objective standards of critical thought and value. He is not against this or that critic. What he attacks is not the critic or the poet but certain inexactitudes latent in their works. If required, Eliot is generally liberal in his praise. He commends Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction;<sup>33</sup> appreciates Keats for "his occupations only with the highest use of poetry";<sup>34</sup> and calls Arnold "the most satisfactory man of letters of his age" whom he says, "we cannot afford to neglect."<sup>35</sup> He clarifies his own position:—

"Each generation, like each individual, brings to the contemplation of art its own categories of appreciation, makes its own demands upon art, and had its own uses of art. . . . Hence each new master of criticism performs a useful service merely by the fact that his errors are of a different kind from the last; and the longer the sequence of critics we have, the greater amount of correction is possible."<sup>36</sup>

Eliot's stress on the thorough study of the art of each generation and the relative utility of the errors of subsequent critics as a means of correction and qualification of literary values, brings us close to his theory of tradition. His essay on "**Tradition and the Individual Talent**" which was published in 1919, forms the **Locus classics** of his principles of literary criticism. Its basic theme runs through the entire body of his literary activity. This essay coupled with "**The Functions of**

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32. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 43.

33. Eliot, T. S.—*U.P.U.C.*, p. 67.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*, p. 109.



**Criticism**" brought out in 1923, solemnly declares the purpose, principles and methods he proposes to establish in literary criticism. Tradition with Eliot is not the maintenance of certain dogmas and beliefs. It has a wider meaning and significance. In fact, all his literary effort is deeply rooted in his ideas of tradition. These ideas are scattered through his writings, yet they present a unified thought and integral system. From the beginning till late in Eliot's career, the whole vision of life and literature is predominantly inspired by his own notions of tradition. For example, he says in *After Strange Gods*:—

"What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits, and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of 'the same people living in the same place'."<sup>37</sup>

Here, Eliot does not mean a sentimental attitude towards the past. He neither favours, clinging to "unessentials" nor does he advocate hostility to "change." He is for the preservation of the real and the vital in the past. It is this vitality which, according to Eliot, must be maintained in order to stimulate life. In this context, tradition is not "feeling" only, but a concern of "intellect" also. The loss of such traditional values amounts to the loss of vitality, hence, of life. Therefore, he asserts: "By loosing tradition we loose our hold on the present."<sup>38</sup>

In literature, as in the life of people, Eliot restates the same point:—

"Tradition cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone, who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth-year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole literature of Europe from Homer and within it, the whole of the

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37. *After Strange Gods*, p. 18.

38. *The Sacred Wood*, p. 62.

literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”<sup>39</sup>

Eliot has made important observations. He says that literary tradition is not a matter of inheritance. Only the persistent efforts can obtain it. A maturer poet must imbibe in him the “historical sense”—the life breath of tradition. It is this sense of history which interconnects the past, the present and the future. The historical sense again paves the way for a close intercommunion or interfusion between the classics on the one hand, and the literature of the writers’ own country, on the other. It broadens the mental horizons of the artist; functions as a sort of discipline for him; and stimulates a process of creative activity—genuinely novel, highly artistic and completely objective. In the ultimate analysis, this sense of the pastness of the past as also of its presentness—the very essence of literary tradition—makes the artist feel the current of the whole of a literature which is essentially “one” and steadily “living.” As a result of this feeling, the “creative” as well as “critical” genius strives for perfection in literary standards and values.

In *The Music of Poetry*, published in 1942, Eliot repeats the same assertion:—

“Concern with the future requires a concern with the past also; for in order to know, what there is to be done, we need a pretty accurate knowledge of what has been done already and this again leads to the examination of those principles and conditions which hold good always.”<sup>40</sup>

The true sense of tradition in this respect is, according to Eliot, a must for an artist aspiring to improve literary values of art which may vary from the technical to the fundamental. The programmatic interest in the future will naturally kindle in a conscientious mind, an urge for the pragmatic analysis of the past, opening thus, new vistas of critical efforts, patterns and methods. But the most emphatic assertion for preserving tradition is made by Eliot in the introduction to *The Sacred Wood*:—

“It is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition—

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39. Selected Prose: *Tradition and The Individual Talent*, p. 23.

40. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P.: *The Music of Poetry*, p. 26.

where a good tradition exists. It is part of his business to see literature steadily and see it as a whole; but this is eminently to see it not as consecrated by time but see it beyond time."<sup>41</sup>

Eliot is prescribing here, a code for the literary critic. He is asking the critic to preserve tradition and thus equip himself with the necessary artistic vision to elucidate any work of art. The knowledge of the past brings forth precise models and standards to serve as tools for making comparative study of the present ones. Another important task which the critic is expected to do is to correct and qualify literature of the present by means of his knowledge of the past.

This kind of organic vision of literature establishes a living relationship of the present artist with those of the past. He is brought in the company of the **dead** for the purpose of evaluation which cannot be made in isolation. Eliot says, that no poet or artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. In order to evaluate him, we must set him for **contrast and comparison**. "I mean this", declares Eliot, "as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism."<sup>42</sup>

The declaration involves some fundamental implications: First, the artist is to be judged by the standards of the past. Second, it is going to be a "judgment", not "amputation."<sup>43</sup> Third, the judgment is not either final or for good, bad and worse.<sup>44</sup> Fourth, it is only a sort of comparison where two things are measured by each other. Lastly, the canons applied for measuring the artist must not be of the **dead** critics.<sup>45</sup> The emphasis on the word dead here, is of special significance.

But there are ambiguities which still remain unexplained. First, that Eliot talks of the standards of the past but does not refer to contemporary standards. Second, the judgment being not "final, good, bad or worse", appears a remote possibility. Third, the adjective "**dead**" qualifying the critics has

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41. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*: Introduction, xv.

42. *Selected Prose*, p. 23.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

not been clarified. May be, Eliot is thinking of the changes in the types and standards of literature as a result of the changes in the sensibility of the age. What he suggests is perhaps this phenomenon which any critic must take into account. For instance, application of romantic canons in judging the Augustan literature, would be of no use.

Tradition, therefore, is the living spirit of critical activity. The important critic is always absorbed in the present problems of art. He is the person who assimilates in his thought and technique, the consciousness of the past. He must be conversant with the "main current",<sup>46</sup> flowing invariably even through ordinary reputations. According to Eliot, such grasp of the past empowers any critic to solve his present problems. It is in this sense, that the pastness of the past bears its direct impact on the present. Hence, Eliot comes to believe that a common and continuous strain of literary tradition is running through the veins of the Past, the Present and the Future.

In short, Eliot's final position, in the matter of tradition is that a concern for the future, generated by the present, necessitates a concern for the past. The standards of the past, provide matter and manner for the present. The present is also engaged in a similar activity, though in a different way. In the form of new works of art, it is making its own contribution towards the heritage of the past. As a result, the pastness of the past also appears in a process of alteration—an alteration which each new work of art stimulates. Therefore Eliot comes to the general conclusion that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.<sup>47</sup> This organic vision of great art as a whole is the resultant product of what Eliot repeatedly claims, the "living sense of tradition."

If, on the one extreme, Eliot stresses on the indispensability of Tradition, on the other, he strongly voices his opposition to the preponderance of individualism. In his essay,

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46. *Selected Prose* (Penguin), p. 25.

47. S.P., p. 23.

"**Tradition and the Individual Talent**", Eliot develops what is popularly known as The Impersonal Theory of Art:—

"The poet must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his private mind—is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing enroute."<sup>48</sup>

He continues:—

"The poet must continue to develop his consciousness of the past throughout his career" which means "a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable."<sup>49</sup>

He goes on:—

"The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."<sup>50</sup>

He concludes:—

"It is in this depersonalisation that art may be said to approach the condition of Science."<sup>51</sup>

He repeats:—

"There is accordingly something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to earn and to obtain his unique position."<sup>52</sup>

In the extracts quoted above, Eliot has made some very significant observations. He demands from the poet an awareness of the mind, viewed not from a limited perspective, but from a broader one. He prescribes that the poet must aim at something higher to which his efforts must be directed all his life. He must develop in him, an ever increasing consciousness of the past and his personal emotions must be objectified entirely therein. This depersonalisation of the artist, according to Eliot, is the pre-requisite of art that is natural, concrete and real.

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48. S.P., p. 24.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

Eliot lays stress on two aspects of his Impersonal theory of poetry: first, the conception of poetry as a living whole, viz., the relation of one poem to other poems by other authors; secondly, the relation of the poem to its own author. He advocates that honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon his poetry. He pours scorn over the knack of fact-finding in contemporary criticism; "inquiring into the number of times giraffes are mentioned in the English novel." He denounces in categorical terms that "the discovery of Shakespeare's laundry bills would not be of much use to us." Biographical statistics can be of some advantage but they can never be literary criticism. Eliot's position in the early stages is one of reaction and re-assessment. He reacts to the vogue of romantic emotionalism and condemns the Historical and the Biographical types of literary criticism. His concern for impersonality in art is the immediate result of his concern for reassessment. In order to clarify his position, he uses the oft-repeated analogy of the catalyst:—

"The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates."<sup>53</sup>

The word "emotion", occurring so frequently in Eliot's criticism is, in fact, very baffling. Eliot, from the beginning, is against the poetry of emotions. He calls emotions recollected in tranquillity an "inexact formula."<sup>54</sup> It is his search for "human significance", that stimulates his interest in ordering of the emotions. He is opposed to the emotions exercising a despotic hold over human action. He wants to depersonalise them.

In the process of depersonalisation or objectification of emotion, it is the intellect which holds the key:—

"The poet's mind is a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together."<sup>55</sup>

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53. S.P., p. 26.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The new compound as pointed out by Eliot is to result in what he qualifies as "the new art emotion."<sup>56</sup> Its final emergence will take place by a process of spontaneous fusion, which the poet's mind regulates like a catalyst. According to Eliot, "great variety"<sup>57</sup> is possible in the process of transmutation of these emotions.

But he emphatically declares that the greatness of the fusion does not lie in the intensity of the emotions—the components—but in the "artistic process, the pressure so to speak under which the fusion takes place."<sup>58</sup> The intensity of such an artistic pressure appears to involve question of technique, which in Eliot's view is never "conscious."<sup>59</sup> It results from some ecstatic mood alienated from the sphere of reason. Eliot cites the example of Keats:—

"The Ode of Keats contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly perhaps because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation, served to bring together."<sup>60</sup>

Certainly the genesis of Keats' feelings is like parallel lines meeting at infinity. The riddle is not possible to explain. To Eliot, it is a sort of concentration which does not happen "consciously or of deliberation."<sup>61</sup>

Eliot's emphasis on depersonalisation of emotions in poetry is born, perhaps, out of a deep skepticism and distrust for individual personality. In this respect, he might have been influenced by Hulme's doctrine of original Sin and man's inability to reach perfection. Eliot acknowledges this fact when he says:—

"the point of view I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality."<sup>62</sup>

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56. S.P., p. 29.

57. *Ibid*, p. 27.

58. *Ibid*, p. 25.

59. *Ibid*, p. 29.

60. *Ibid*, p. 27.

61. *Ibid*, p. 29.

62. *Ibid*, p. 27.

In this medium, different permutations and combinations are regularly formed out of impressions and experiences of the poet. Eliot is of the opinion that even "very ordinary experiences may find their place in poetry",<sup>63</sup> while the important ones remain negligible. And impressions, significant from the point of view of man in the poet, may be of little or of no importance for the poet in him.

Eliot's "Impersonal Theory of Art" does not envisage a total negation of emotions in poetry. What he is after, is a process of their objectification. The significance of a poet does not lie in the nature or the variety of his personal emotions. His personal emotions may be simple, crude or flat while the emotions in his poetry will be a complex affair. Eliot is against hunting after novelty of emotions in poetry. He explains:—

"The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all."<sup>64</sup>

In fact, he is propounding what he qualifies as "a new art emotion", which in its very nature is impersonal.

And this impersonality, according to Eliot, cannot be achieved unless the poet surrenders himself wholly to the work, which he proposes to do. He concludes:—

"Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."<sup>65</sup>

Which means that Eliot stands for the neutralisation of personal emotions rather than their total negation or erasion. He wants their ordering through an artistic process, so that their despotic effects in human actions are brought under control. In their depersonalisation, he visualises the birth of a "new art emotion"—the fusion of emotion and feeling directed by the mind. But his repeated obsession with "extinction of personality" as a pre-condition of great art, takes him to an extreme that is hardly tenable. It is a position from which

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63. *Ibid.*

64. S.P., p. 29.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 29.



Eliot had to retreat in his later criticism.<sup>66</sup> He had to reconcile himself to a moderate point of view.

Eliot's re-interpretation of emotion and its function in poetry leads us directly to his study of the Metaphysical poets and the Jacobean dramatists. He praises these poets and dramatists by expounding the theory of "Dissociation of Sensibility." He accounts for the verbal and sensuous abundance of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists and the metaphysical poets through the invocation of feeling and sensibility. According to Eliot, they possess a mechanism of sensibility, powerful enough to devour any experience. He compares them to Dante, Cavalcanti and Cino. He laments the decline of this sensibility in the Seventeenth century and says:—

"In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in from which we have never recovered."<sup>67</sup>

The loss, he specifically characterises, is that "with the language becoming more refined, the feeling became more crude."<sup>68</sup> Referring to Tennyson, Browning and Donne, Eliot elaborates the same theme. The first two are poets and they think; but they do not feel their thought "as immediately as the odour of a rose."<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, Donne to Eliot is an intellectual poet. A thought to him was an experience, which modified his sensibility. Eliot praises the "massive music of Donne";<sup>70</sup> and feels that Johnsonian criticism against him must be broken up. Besides, these poets—Donne, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert, Lord Herbert, Marvell, King and Cowley—in all their difference of kind and degree, be rehabilitated, in their true perspective.<sup>71</sup> Eliot registers one of the most successful pleas in the court of literature when he declares that the metaphysical poets, at their best "are in the direct current of English poetry."<sup>72</sup> According to him, the

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66. *Ibid*, p. 186.

67. *Selected Prose*, p. 111.

68. *Ibid*.

69. *Ibid*, p. 110.

70. *Ibid*, p. 114.

71. *Ibid*, p. 113.

72. *Ibid*.

adjectives such as "quaint", "obscure" and "eccentric" should not be used to describe their qualities. The modern poets, he suggests, must follow the line and example of the metaphysicals. Eliot sounds a note of caution:—

"Those who object to the 'artificiality' of Milton or Dryden, sometimes tell us 'to look into our hearts and write.' But that is not looking deep enough; Racine or Donne looked into a good deal more than the heart. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system and the digestive tracts."<sup>73</sup>

Eliot's concept of "dissociation of sensibility" is further clarified by his remarks that "the poets in the sentimental age thought and felt by fits and reflected."<sup>74</sup> Eliot feels that the process of unification of sensibility which started with the Elizabethans and the Jacobean; and which was continued by the Metaphysicals, could not be carried further by the succeeding generation of poets. The result was that the poets grew less comprehensive, less allusive, and more direct. They could neither force, nor dislocate, even if necessary, language into their meaning. They grew unbalanced and started ruminating. It is in this context that Eliot's resurrection of the metaphysical poets and his insistence to copy their mode and pattern, are of great importance.

Thus, Eliot's appraisal of the Metaphysicals, in the light of sensibility highlights one of the significant aspects of his early criticism—the role of intellect in the process of poetry. Eliot lays emphasis on the merging of the intellect with the senses. The intellectual poet is able to feel his thought immediately. He is capable of a "direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling."<sup>75</sup> According to Eliot, the moment, a poet begins to ruminate, his thoughts are divorced from his feelings. Sensibility to Eliot is obviously something in which feeling and thought are used as "dual and inseparable agents not only of perception but also of poetic creation."<sup>76</sup> A poem in this way tends to be a precise way

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73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 102.

of feeling and thinking. The function of the poet is to bring the resources of feeling, thought and language to bear on his subject in such a way as to present an actuality. Therefore, Eliot stresses on the need of separating the man from the artist, because, in that case, the chance of emotion entering in an undisguised form, and distorting or deflecting the feeling, would be very meagre. Eliot assigns a primary place to thought and feeling in the process of poetry while emotion, though important as the subject of poetry, has no say in the artistic process of its shaping. The role of emotion in this sense is secondary, disguised and dormant. The importance of the artistic process is two fold: first, to dramatise emotions; and second, to externalise them, by making them surrender before sensibility, "acting as judge and maker."<sup>77</sup> The description of such artistic process is contained in his famous analogy on the "Objective Correlative."

"The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare's more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence; you will find that the state of mind of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep has been communicated to you by a skilful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions. . . . The artistic inevitability lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*."<sup>78</sup>

The whole passage shows Eliot's concern for doing away with the adverse effects of emotion in poetry. He does not want it to manifest itself in a direct way. He aims at its dramatisation or objectification, to be achieved by the power of feeling. Emotion in this context ceases to be an agent of creation and becomes the compound of a poem. It is a set of objects, a situation, or chain of events, which shall reflect in a concrete manner, the image of a particular emotion. This image again shall be invoked through the sensory experience

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77. *Ibid*, p. 106.

78. Selected Prose, *Hamlet*, p. 102.

and in terms of feeling. Thus feeling has to embody, a sense of emotion, a sense of language and a sense of actuality of life and its significance. A correlative or symbol—an object, situation or event—of this type can express an objective observation in terms of a subjective experience and a general truth in terms of subjective truth. The emotion is made concrete or idolised in a different way than that experienced by the poet. The triumph of *Samson Agonistes* lies in Milton's complete success in finding there a dramatic situation that would externalise his own emotions and give them universal stature.<sup>79</sup> *Hamlet* is an artistic failure because the essential emotion of the play—the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother—could not be objectified. Eliot, therefore, makes a categorical declaration:—

“In the character *Hamlet*, it is the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion which he cannot express in art.”<sup>80</sup>

The objectification of emotion appears to involve three stages: first, the actual experience; second, the attitude of the poet formed out of that and similar experiences; and third, a universalised outlook representing the spirit of the age. The second and the third stages are marked by personal and general attitudes respectively. In many poems, when both the attitudes appear, they exhibit double meanings. The surface displays the objectified meaning, but at the bottom, there lies “the meaning which is generalised while still belonging to the poet.”<sup>81</sup> *The Waste Land* in this respect incorporates meanings at both the levels. It shows a sense of general disillusionment on the one hand, and the poet's personal feelings, on the other.

In his concept of objective correlative, Eliot appears to have been influenced by the visual imagery of Dante, the precise descriptions of Hulme, and the condensed expressions of Ezra Pound. The expression such as:—

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79. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 58.

80. Selected Prose, (Penguin), p. 103.

81. Smidt Kristian—*Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, p. 42.

"I have measured out my life with Coffee spoons" shows a close affinity of Eliot with Pound's definition of an "Image" as "presenting an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."<sup>82</sup> This amalgam of intellectual and emotional complex, corresponds to Eliot's notion of "emotional equivalent of thought" as the main concern of the poet. Eliot, on the one extreme, is against emotions exercising an undue hold on the poet; but on the other, he is equally hostile to over-intellectualisation in poetry. In fact, he deems poetry a presentation of thought and feeling by means of "events in human action, or objects in the external world." Eliot's remarks about the Metaphysicals being engaged in the task of finding out "verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling,"<sup>83</sup> explain his position vis-a-vis the concept of objective correlative. The reference to "states of mind and feeling" suggests that Eliot is minimizing the interplay of pure emotion, personal to the poet,<sup>84</sup> which ultimately brings us back to his Theory of Impersonality in art.

All of Eliot's literary theorisation, in the beginning, is idealised by a missionary desire for what he declares in the essay "**The Functions of Criticism**" (1923) as "the correction of taste."<sup>85</sup> He dissects not only the body of criticism but operates the critic also. He acknowledges, that it is difficult to eject impostors from the domain of criticism, which is no better than "a Sunday park of contending and contentious orators."<sup>86</sup> He prescribes that in order to justify his existence, the critic should discipline his personal "cranks and prejudices."<sup>87</sup> He eulogises that the end of criticism is the "elucidation of works of art." Elucidation is not interpretation in the ordinary sense of the word. In Eliot's version, legitimate interpretation is "merely putting the reader in possession of

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82. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievements of T. S. Eliot*, p. 61.

83. *Selected Essays*, p. 248.

84. Brooks Cleanth—*Literary Criticism*, p. 669.

85. *Selected Prose* (Penguin), p. 18.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

facts, which he would otherwise, have missed."<sup>88</sup> He is against any such method, or mode of interpretation, which prejudices the mind of the readers. He advocates presentation of simple kind of facts about a work—its conditions, its setting, its genesis—to develop right liking. Eliot shows his dislike for cheap critical literature, which in the long run, corrupts literary standard and taste. He is opposed to the supply of literature of "opinion and fancy",<sup>89</sup> but exhibits an extraordinary interest in furnishing facts of a piece of art. He asserts:—

"And any books, any essay, any note in Notes and Queries, which produces a fact even of the lowest order about a work of art is a better piece of work than nine-tenths of the most pretentious critical journalism, in journals or in books."<sup>90</sup>

The reasons, he gives, are two-fold: first, the multiplication of critical books and essays vitiates taste for reading about works of art instead of reading the works themselves; second, they may supply opinion but do not educate taste."<sup>91</sup>

In the same essay—**The Functions of Criticism**—Eliot qualifies comparison and analysis as the chief tools of the critic. These tools, he observes, must be handled with care. They need only "the cadavers on the table" as against interpretation requiring "to produce parts of the body from its pockets."<sup>92</sup> But Eliot is emphatic to make a declaration as to the use of cadavers. "The ancients", he says, "open the gates as guides, not commanders."<sup>93</sup> He implores us to give Aristotle and others their dues, to the extent they inculcate interest for making further discoveries of truth. They suggest and enforce a method of comparison and analysis, which if repeatedly applied to the original, sharpens objectivity; enhances competency; and broadens insight and understanding.<sup>94</sup> The classics, in this context, open new vistas of art and reassert its values. They educate taste: both critical and creative.

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88. S.P., p. 20.

89. *Ibid.*

90. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 20

92. *Ibid.*

93. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 48.

94. *Selectd Prose*, p. 32.

Criticism, then, is more a matter of taste than merely a set of hard and fast rules. Taste implies insight and perception which may vary from critic to critic. It depends upon the sensibility of the individual critics, which, according to Eliot, must be developed through a process of experience and discipline, spread over to a long span of time and labour. Again, this process of experience is not merely the "sum of the experiences of good poems."<sup>95</sup> Its first requisite is its "ability to select a good new poem and to respond properly to a new situation."<sup>96</sup> Secondly, it involves organisation of all such experiences in poetry. Eliot says:—

"There is not one of us who is born with, or who suddenly acquires at puberty or later, an infallible discrimination and taste. The person whose experience is limited is always liable to be taken in by the sham or the adulterate article."<sup>97</sup>

Then, the critical sense, in Eliot's view, is the amalgam of "an innate and developed taste."<sup>98</sup> A limited experience is liable to lead to immature judgments. It would adversely effect the critic and his criticism. Therefore, Eliot offers an integrated plan for the development of taste in poetry.<sup>99</sup> He makes certain generalisations on the basis of his own experience. He feels that the majority of children up to say twelve or fourteen, are capable of a certain enjoyment of poetry. At or about puberty, a small minority of them shows a craving for poetry. At the age of nineteen or twenty—a time of rapid assimilation—the poem or the poetry of a single poet invades the youthful consciousness and assumes complete possession. The final or the mature stage of enjoyment of poetry comes when one ceases to identify oneself with the poet; and becomes aware of one's critical faculties. The poem, at this stage, has "its own existence",<sup>100</sup> apart from the reader, who is able now to distinguish between various degrees of greatness in poetry.

95. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 18.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

97. *Ibid.*

98. Lucy Sean—*Eliot and the Idea of Tradition*, p. 50.

99. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 32.

100. U.P.U.C., p. 32.

Eliot is of the view, that recommending poetry, uncongenial to the degree of maturity in the readers, would be of no use. It would "deadens their sensibility" to poetry and confound the genuine development of taste with its sham acquisition. He states the same point in a categorical manner:—

"that to have better 'taste' in poetry than belongs to one's state of development, is not to 'taste' anything at all."<sup>101</sup>

Eliot's concern for preserving tradition and correcting taste is motivated by one and the same desire for "setting the poets and poems in a new order."<sup>102</sup> Through his endeavours, he envisages the creation of new poets and critics. Eliot's stress on the development of taste vis-a-vis the continuity of literature and its essential greatness is part of the critic's business to see the "literary past" as a whole. In this context, tradition and taste appear to be the two facets of the same coin. Eliot strikes a balance between the two, when he says:—

"One function of criticism is to act as a kind of Cog regulating the rate of change of literary taste, when the Cog sticks and reviewers remain fast in the taste of a previous generation, the machine needs to be ruthlessly dismantled and reassembled; when it slips and the reviewer accepts novelty as a sufficient criterion of excellence the machine needs to be stopped and tightened up."<sup>103</sup>

It means that the faults of either of the extremes—the "antiquation of the old" and the "eccentricity of the new"—tend to obstruct the development of taste, which must be properly cultivated and regulated by persistent and conscious efforts of the critics. He reiterates:—

"The true literary mind is likely to grow slowly but surely and positively, provided it is given more comprehensive and more varied diet; is educated under greater experience of men and ideas; and is subjected to a broader knowledge of facts."<sup>104</sup>

The foregoing account would amply reveal that Eliot's criticism in the twenties is inspired and directed by what Arnold lacks—"the maker's point of view."<sup>105</sup> Eliot's endeavours at

101. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

103. *Selected Prose*, p. 216.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

105. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C.: Arnold, p. 108.



this stage are the endeavours of a literary "advocate."<sup>106</sup> Dissatisfied as he is, by the sham, the impure and the artificial trends of the Georgian literature, he takes up the problem of establishing an "order."<sup>107</sup> In poetry, he sets himself to evolve out a "form."<sup>108</sup> In criticism, he tries to build up a relevant code of "aesthetic principles."<sup>109</sup> But, both of his creative and critical faculties form part of the same crusade.

Eliot's harping on the study of the past is accentuated by his desire to establish a "literary order",<sup>110</sup> in the perspective of tradition. Tradition, in this sense, assumes the role of a custodian of all those values which he proposes to expound. In the initial stages it amounts to a sort of obsession with him. He attributes the unreality of the contemporary literature, to the loss of sense of Tradition. Perplexed by the problems of the present, he brought the forces of the past to bear upon their solutions. Interested in the development of taste, Eliot foresees the use of tradition in preventing "antiquation" or accepting "novelty" as the only criterion of excellence. What he aspires to achieve through tradition, is to make use of the past to direct the development of the present, as also to judge its perfectness. Moreover, the sense of tradition, as he envisages, brings forth all literary activity as one "organic whole",<sup>111</sup> which when screened from time to time by major critics, re-orientes the whole complexion of the past also. As a rule, Eliot's theory of Tradition as a means of collective artistic perfection is contestable. It bears a strong resemblance to the "catholic idea of a universal church."<sup>112</sup> Prima-facie it may sound plausible but is certainly imperfect, if put into practice.

But the discipline of tradition vis-a-vis the talent of the artist, which Eliot so ardently puts forth in the twenties,

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106. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 16.

107. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 49.

108. *Ibid*, p. 63.

109. *Ibid*, p. 49.

110. *Ibid*.

111. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 49.

112. Lucy Sean—*Eliot and the Idea of Tradition*, p. 16.

suggesting even the "total extinction of personality", has undergone considerable modifications. He theorises on the impersonality of art with the zeal of a missionary. The theory starts with the aim of neutralising human emotions, but gets so involved as to become confused, complicated and complex. On the one hand, he considers poetry an "escape from emotions." On the other, he sees it, as the "transmutation of human suffering"—suffering met on the personal level, but presented on the general or universal one. Eliot, in this respect, blows hot and cold in the same breath. He is vacillating between continuity and discontinuity in art. Therefore, his concept of impersonality is no more a virtue than tradition is. Paradoxically speaking, the virtues in either theories—Tradition and Impersonality—are valuable to the extent they are personalised and lived.<sup>113</sup>

On another count, where the theory of Impersonality does not hold water, is Eliot's concept of "a new art emotion."<sup>114</sup> Eliot refers to the "significant emotion having its life in the poem."<sup>115</sup> But the "new art emotion" and the "significant emotion" are merely the part of the poem. In case, the personal emotions are too strong to control, they are sure to creep up and have their say in the poem, jeopardising in this way, the process and product of depersonalisation.

Apart from theorisation, Eliot's criticism of the twenties is equally significant in other respects. His essays: **The Perfect Critic**; **Imperfect Critics** and **Homage to Dryden**, contain some of the fine specimens of literary appreciation. In the first two essays, Eliot has attacked the Impressionistic Edwardian School of Arthur Symonds, Charles Whibley and others.<sup>116</sup> His pre-occupations with the Shakespearian and Jacobean dramatists in search of a suitable "form of poetic expression"<sup>117</sup>

113. Buckley, Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 113.

114. Selected Prose, p. 27.

115. *Ibid*, p. 29.

116. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 17.

117. *Ibid*, p. 63.

are very important. Moreover, it is in this period that he explores the possibility of reviving the "poetic drama."<sup>118</sup>

Eliot's literary credo in his early career seems sometimes slightly ambiguous and apparently contradictory. Maybe, the lapses are there. But, they are the lapses of an over-zealous advocate of certain principles in criticism. It is the enthusiastic idealist of the Twenties who prepares the prospectus but in the decades that follow, the maturing humanist prunes away its unnecessary parts.

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118. Eliot, T. S.—*Ibid.*, p. 60.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CRITIC IN THE THIRTIES

Eliot comments:—

“So far as I can judge”, “from quotations and reprints in anthologies, it is my earlier essays which have made the deeper impression.”<sup>1</sup>

He attributes this to two causes: first, the dogmatism of his youth; and second the implicit defence at his hands, of the poetry he and his friends were writing then. Both the causes, he asserts give his criticism, “a kind of urgency the warmth of appeal of the advocate which his later, more detached criticism cannot claim.”<sup>2</sup> He confesses:—

“I was in reaction not only against Georgian poetry but against Georgian criticism; I was writing in a context which the reader of today has either forgotten or has never experienced.”<sup>3</sup>

The confession is significant. It is illustrative in as far as it provides valuable clues to Eliot’s mind and its working. The extract, being part of a convocation lecture delivered at the University of Leeds in July 1961, throws a searching light on the nature and scope of his early criticism. In the same lecture, he asserts:—

“In reviewing my own early criticism, I am struck by the degree to which it was conditioned by the state of literature at the time at which it was written as well as by the stage of maturity at which I had arrived by the influences to which I had been exposed and by the occasion of each essay.”<sup>4</sup>

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1. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 16.
  2. *Ibid.*
  3. *Ibid.*
  4. *To Criticise the Critic*, p. 16.

The assertion is valuable. Eliot is subjecting his early criticism to his stage of maturity and various other influences. It shows that he is conscious of his occasional flaws and faults. He sums up:—

“I hope that what I have said today may suggest reasons why, as the critic grows older, his critical writings may be less fired by enthusiasm, but informed by wider interest and one hopes, by greater wisdom and humility.”<sup>5</sup>

These excerpts from Eliot’s convocation lecture are categorically self-explanatory. Distanced as they are, from his earlier essays, by more than four decades, they provide a sort of integral continuity to the entire genre of his critical endeavour. In spite of the fact that during this long span of time, Eliot has been shifting emphasis from one aspect of literature to another, his criticism appears essentially of a piece. The essence of his growing position remains the same. He has never ceased to demand from the poet a sort of self-surrender to the judgment of an objective presence in history.<sup>6</sup> It is merely the conception of this presence, that indicates some change, sometimes.

Eliot’s criticism in the thirties is marked by a new strain, the glimpses of which are discernible in his introduction to the 2nd edition of *The Sacred Wood* in 1928 and the essay “**Baudelaire in Our Time**” published in the same year. Eliot himself acknowledges that in between 1920 and 1928, he has come to give weight to an additional problem: “that of the relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and of other times.”<sup>7</sup> To understand fully the implications of the “additional problem” suggested herein, it is necessary to follow the basic position which Eliot has taken earlier.

His early criticism is marked by a characteristic stress on “impersonality” and “order” in art. The whole critical effort is moulded through the conception of poetry having an “autotelic character.” He emphasizes on the “reality” and “autonomy” of poetry. He is not prepared to bestow it with any

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5. *To Criticise the Critic*, p. 26.

6. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, Introduction.

7. *The Sacred Wood*: Introduction, p. x.

other status either equivalent of or substitute for something else. Poetry is conceived as a process where the mind of the poet is just a medium. Operating through feeling and being directed by the course of tradition, the poet thus creates, what Eliot thinks, impersonal art, consistent with the highest standards of the past.

Poetry, purely as a process, envisaged by Eliot, suggests two requirements: first, its autonomy, and second, "continual extinction of Personality." This assessment is based on the relation of the poet to his poetry. He is explicitly silent on the moral reality of poetry. Eliot in the initial stages is measuring "poetic intactness in its own terms,"<sup>8</sup> and in nothing else. He deliberately avoids moral judgment or prescription. The reasons are obvious. He is simultaneously engaged in critical as well as creative practice. As such his main interest for the time being is to create a coterie of intelligent readers and followers. In *The Sacred Wood*, therefore, he points out some critical guide-lines, which closely bear upon his own creative practice.

Moreover, Eliot's view of morality may be called "inadvertent-didacticism."<sup>9</sup> The reality of a poem (and hence its moral stature) is connected with the reality which the poet investigates; and that reality is largely the actuality, the immediacy, of his own emotions. It is in this context that Eliot prefers the reality of emotions of the poet to the reality of the external world, as poetic subject. The emotions for him assume a primary place while the external world remains secondary. His stress on their dramatisation, apart from artistic considerations is full of didactic strain. It is on account of two reasons: First, the self-investigation of the poet into his own emotions, being pervaded by good and evil, is always moral and spiritual. Second, the reality confronting the poet ceases to be personal, the moment it is dramatised. It tends to be the reality of a permanent state of human mind.

With this synoptic discussion of the basic view of Eliot in the beginning, the gradual shift in his position by the end

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8. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, Preface, ix.

9. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*.

of the twenties can be easily understood. By 1926, he has begun to erect into an "open standard"<sup>10</sup> the notions that lie behind his criticism of Arnold and P. E. More in *The Sacred Wood*.<sup>11</sup> He criticises Arnold's denition of poetry: "criticism of life" as "shallow, provincial and lacking seriousness."<sup>12</sup> He prefers the poetry of Dante to that of Shakespeare because of "illustrating a sober attitude towards the mysteries of life."<sup>13</sup> He praises Baudelaire for "seeing truly"<sup>14</sup> into his own condition and goes to the extent of finding him "primarily occupied in religious values."<sup>15</sup> He stresses, for the first time, on the "socio-spiritual"<sup>16</sup> aspect of poetry. He declares in unequivocal terms:—

"On the other hand, poetry as certainly has something to do with morals, and with religion, and with politics perhaps, though we cannot say what."<sup>17</sup>

The declaration, though conditioned by "we cannot say what", marks the end of a process of transition—transition from a purely poetic process to a religio-socio-literary order. In *Religion and Literature*, Eliot makes an important statement:—

"Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint. In so far as in any age there is common agreement on ethical and theological matters, so far can literary criticism be substantive. In ages like our own, in which there is no such common agreement it is the more necessary for Christian readers to scrutinize their reading, especially or works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards. The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards."<sup>18</sup>

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10. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 134.
  11. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 43.
  12. *Ibid.*
  13. S. W., Introduction, 1928, Ed. p. x.
  14. Eliot, T. S.—*Essays Ancient and Modern*, p. 67.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
  16. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, Introduction, p. viii.
  17. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 31.
  18. *Ibid.*

This is perhaps, the most controversial statement, ever made by Eliot. May be, the shift in his position is the result of his allegiance to catholic Christianity; or it may have been brought by the compulsions of the international crisis the world was facing in the beginning of the thirties. But it is important to recall, that the critic in Eliot, in the early twenties, speaks with the singleness of purpose—the purpose of a literary enthusiast. The thirties experience an additional strain: he speaks with a different voice. It is the voice of a humanist.

Before initiating a detailed study of Eliot's criticism of this period, it is necessary to point out some of its important features, as compared and contrasted to those elucidated earlier. In the first place, an evaluation in terms of impersonality is the key note of Eliot's early criticism. But, from 1932 onwards, he is less concerned with the emphasis on impersonality of art. His main endeavour gradually assumes a new complexion. He starts exposing and censuring the eccentricities of different poets. Secondly, the epistemological interest of the early period is radically transformed into the metaphysical one, in the thirties. Thirdly, in *The Sacred Wood*, the stress is on the poet as "medium", being directed by tradition but in turn, may be very slightly, modifying the tradition itself. In *After Strange Gods* the stress is shifted from the play of "medium" to that of "tradition."<sup>19</sup> The poet's sensibility, now, is to be judged by the extent to which it is enlightened by tradition. Fourthly, the animus of tradition is asserted as part and parcel of Christian morals and philosophy. Fifthly, greater emphasis is made on "orthodoxy of the sensibility" which conceives, controls and classifies emotions, but does not aim at probing their reality. The emotions in this way are made subservient to orthodoxy of the sensibility which means, moral reality is a precondition before emotions are fully and successfully actualised. No doubt that the sensibility of the poet is stressed as a guarantee to ensure impersonality; yet the emphasis is on its orthodox character. It implies not that sensibility which is directed by the general wisdom of the community, as stated in Eliot's early criticism, but the one, actualised in the Christian sense of good and evil.

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19. Bickley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 143.



Sixthly, there is now greater stress on analysing human life more minutely than was done or suggested in the Twenties. The general attitude centres round a new criterion: "to see life steadily and see it whole."<sup>20</sup>

Lastly, even if the literary values seem to remain the same, the stress which at one time is on "poetic process" as custodian of those values, is shifted to ultimate sanctions and considerations.

We must guard against one misunderstanding, which is likely to arise out of the comparative summary we have presently made. It should not be gathered that the critic's moral interests have increased overnight. The real position is that the moral emphasis which had been dormant and passive till the end of the 2nd decade, becomes more explicit and pronounced.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, insistence on moral values shows a rising graph, even to the degree of "disproportionateness."

In *After Strange Gods* and the essay "Religion and Literature" Eliot becomes explicitly interested in finding ways and means to protect sensibility from degenerating and corrupting influences of eccentric writers. He begins to affirm impersonality in a negative way. He is passing censures on the personal whims and idiosyncrasies of the poets and the writers. His concern shows a sort of negative didacticism in as far as he reveals the misuses of personality. The censures he passes on Hardy and his novels display the extent of anger he has nourished against such fiction which "affects behaviour."<sup>22</sup> He attacks Hardy on six counts: his powerful personality "un-  
curbed by any institutional attachment"; extreme "emotionalism"; lack of "objective beliefs"; obsession for "self-expression"; his "indifference even to the prescripts of good writing" and finally, the peculiar use that he makes of the landscape for purposes of "self-absorption."<sup>23</sup> He comments:—

"In consequence of his self-absorption, he makes a great deal

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20. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 47.

21. Eliot, T. S.—*Elizabethan Dramatists*.

22. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 35.

23. *Ibid*, p. 185.

of landscape; for landscape is a passive creative which lends itself to an author's mood. Landscape is fitted too for the purposes of an author who is interested not at all in men's minds, but only in their emotions; and perhaps only in men as vehicles for emotions."<sup>24</sup>

Eliot's attack in the whole passage is directed against too much a "personal view of life." Hardy's self-absorption and self-indulgence are at the root of his exploitation of the landscape. The "vehicles of emotions" referred in the passage, mean to Eliot, the vehicles of his "private emotions", which display an inherent moral and spiritual flaw. "This extreme emotionalism", he asserts, "seems to me a symptom of decadence."<sup>25</sup> It amounts to "deliberately releasing emotions of his own at the cost of the reader."<sup>26</sup> Eliot's position is clear. He attacks Hardy for his imbalance, resulting in his weak moral sense. His extreme emotionalism, and sheer self-indulgence show the lack of what Eliot demands from the writer, an "orthodox sensibility."

We have discussed Eliot's notion of "dissociation of sensibility" in the preceding chapter. Sensibility to him, is obviously something in which feeling and thought are used as dual and inseparable agents not only of perception but also of poetic creation. In the changed circumstances, after his allegiance to Catholic Christianity, Eliot's demand from the writers of orthodox sensibility has assumed wide significance and has even earned unfavourable comments. He has not fully explained anywhere what he actually means by the use of the appended adjective: "orthodox." Whatever meaning "orthodoxy" has come to retain, is the result of its uses that the critic has made in different contexts.

For instance, Eliot says:—

"We are not concerned with the author's beliefs, but with orthodoxy of sensibility and with the sense of tradition, our degree of approaching that "region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead."<sup>27</sup>

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24. S.P., p. 185.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

26. Eliot, T. S.—*After Strange Gods*, p. 56.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

He continues:—

"The artistic sensibility is impoverished by its divorce from the religious sensibility, and the religious by its separation from the artistic."<sup>28</sup>

He declares:—

"Aesthetic sensibility must be extended into spiritual perception, and spiritual perception must be extended into aesthetic sensibility and disciplined taste before we are qualified to pass judgment upon decadence or diabolism or nihilism in art."<sup>29</sup>

He links Tradition and Orthodoxy, together:—

"Tradition by itself is not enough; it must be perpetually criticised and brought up-to-date under the supervision of what I call orthodoxy."<sup>30</sup>

He demarcates their functions:—

"A tradition is rather a way of feeling and acting which characterizes a group throughout generations; and (that) it must largely be, or that many of the elements in it must be, unconscious; whereas the maintenance of orthodoxy is a matter which calls for the exercise of all our conscious intelligence. The two will therefore considerably complement each other."<sup>31</sup>

All these stray references suggest, by implication, Eliot's stand vis-a-vis orthodoxy and tradition; the nature and extent of their functions; their relationship and relative value in art and literature. While Eliot defines tradition as "rather a way of feeling and acting", he evades defining orthodoxy and refers only to its functioning on a conscious plane. The extracts cultivate an impression, that to Eliot, sensibility—artistic, religious and aesthetic—is all one and unified activity. What he means by orthodoxy of sensibility is that it is primarily an ethical quality. It is this quality in an outstanding writer which makes him feel and read about human life and its external realities in a way wherein moral implications get precedence over their other counterparts. In poems or novels, where emotions are the subject matter, the orthodoxy of sen-

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28. Eliot, T. S.—*Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 26.

29. *Ibid*, p. 30.

30. Eliot, T. S.—*After Strange Gods*, p. 62.

31. *Ibid*, p. 29.

sibility, would function, not only through the reality of such emotions, but also through their relationship with an entire set-up of life. Hence, any literary work of merit ought to contribute positively towards the revelation of some human condition. But how and in what balance the contribution is to be measured? Eliot's answer, perhaps, is: through the sanction of morals as reflected in the Christian sense of good and evil.<sup>32</sup> He refers to Baudelaire and Joyce as highly ethical because they display a desirable degree of "orthodoxy of sensibility." The reason is apparent. Both of them are engaged in portraying the essentially limited nature of man and his condition.

Tradition and orthodoxy have been shown as related to each other. Tradition is considered in terms of something hypothetical. It is orthodoxy which is to preserve, control, judge and supervise tradition. It means that tradition is being assigned now a secondary role—secondary in the sense that it has been brought under the supervision of orthodoxy. Eliot does not hesitate to confess in **After Strange Gods** that "tradition by itself is not enough"; as also that, "orthodoxy and tradition are complementary to each other." This is a position quite different from the one taken by Eliot in **The Sacred Wood**. He is explicitly silent there as to such a role of orthodoxy. Moreover, his early view is marked by the stress on the poet as "medium." In the later view, the stress shifts from the value of the medium to that of tradition—tradition which is distinctly guided by the moral tests of Christianity.

The incorporation of the concept of orthodoxy into the realm of aesthetics as an authoritative factor, basically affects Eliot's position with regard to the functions of criticism. In **The Sacred Wood**, he stresses on the autotelic nature of art; visualises poetry as a process; and declares the purpose of criticism as "elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste." But, in **The Use of Poetry**, (calling it his eccentricity) he gives the verdict that the study of aesthetics should be guided by sound theology.<sup>33</sup> In the same way, he makes another

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32. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 126.

33. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 150.

important declaration on "the poet's vital concern with the social 'uses' of poetry." In 'Religion and Literature' the assertion becomes more emphatic:—

"Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint.....In so far as in any age there is common agreement on ethical and theological matters, so far can literary criticism be substantive. In ages like our own, in which there is no such agreement it is the more necessary for Christian readers to scrutinize their reading, especially of works of imagination with explicit, ethical and theological standards. The greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards."<sup>34</sup>

The assertion amounts to a declaration of principle. Eliot prescribes "completing literary criticism by definite ethical and theological standpoint." He has exhorted Christian readers to scrutinise works of imagination on the touch-stones of ethical and theological standards. The underlying purpose is their protection from corrupting influences. Finally, he refers to the "greatness of literature" but makes only a negative statement: it cannot be determined solely by literary standards. With what other standards then, the greatness of literature shall have to be determined, Eliot does not specifically mention. That perhaps, is cleverly left suggestive under the cover of rhetoric. It may be inferred that Eliot in this way is appending, in the thirties, an additional and radically different criterion to his literary criticism as against that substantiated earlier in the twenties. Eliot's new emphasis introduces a new element in determining the value of art. It leads to a kind of evaluation which we may term as socio-religious criticism. It raises other complexities, as well. How far the core of such theological standards can be justified as a part of literary criticism? In what way and to what extent Christianity and its standards are relevant to the realm of literary criticism? These are questions which bring us directly to an important issue—the issue of poetry and belief, which at present is not our concern. There has been an honest feeling, not only amongst the critics of Eliot but also his ad-

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34. Eliot, T. S.—(*Religion and Literature*) *Selected Prose*, p. 31.

mirers that too much of socio-religious bias has tarnished his critical faculty. This may be true to a certain extent. But, in *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, he has ably penetrated into the fibre and tissue of pure literary criticism. He has spoken with the same fare and flavour of the early period. The subject of the book is the "varying conceptions of the use of poetry",<sup>35</sup> that the poets themselves have provided in their criticism, during the last three centuries.

Eliot envisages poetry and criticism closely related to each other. He sees the two strains—the critical and the creative—working together. In fact, the appropriate time for the functioning of criticism is the one when poetry "ceases to be the expression of the mind of a whole people."<sup>36</sup> He censures those who treat the two strains as opposed to each other:—

"Nevertheless, those who as if criticism were an occupation of decadence, and a symptom if not cause, of the creative impotence of a people, isolate the circumstances of literature, to the extent of falsification, from the circumstances of life."<sup>37</sup>

He lays stress on close examination of the history of criticism, not merely as a "catalogue of successive notions" about poetry but as a "process of adjustment"<sup>38</sup> between poetry and the world. This he says would lead to the learning of criticism and poetry. He asserts:—

"I only affirm that there is significant relation between the best poetry and the best criticism of the same period."<sup>39</sup>

Speaking on the structure and anatomy of a poem, he says:—

"Any radical change in poetic form is likely to be the symptom of some very much deeper change in society and in the individual."<sup>40</sup>

While appreciating Wordsworth, he further develops the same idea:—

35. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 32.

36. *Ibid*, p. 22.

37. *Ibid*, p. 21.

38. *Ibid*.

39. *Ibid*, p. 30.

40. *Ibid*, p. 75.

"It is Wordsworth's social interest that inspires his own novelty of form in verse and backs up his explicit remarks upon poetic diction."<sup>41</sup>

Demanding from the poet the communication of precise meaning in a poem, he denounces the looseness of the Romantic poets:—

"But poetry has as much to learn from prose as from other poetry; and I think that an interaction between prose and verse like the interaction between language and language, is a condition of vitality in literature."<sup>42</sup>

Some of Eliot's rhetorical phrases, which have gained wide currency in the domain of criticism, are directly inspired by his general outlook towards life and the imperfectibility of man. For example, commenting on Arnold's definition of poetry as "criticism of life", he gives his popular comment:—

"But the essential advantage for a poet is not, to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom and the horror and the glory."<sup>43</sup>

The same outlook regarding man as limited and transient make him say:—

"Pure artistic appreciation is to my thinking only an ideal, when not merely a figment and must be, so long as the appreciation of art is an affair of limited and transient human beings existing in space and time."<sup>44</sup>

Eliot does not see criticism as divorced from life and society. In his view, each age demands different things both from poetry and criticism.<sup>45</sup> Each new artist and master of criticism is required to cater to the demand of their own age. "There is" says Eliot "for each time, for each artist, a kind of alloy, required to make the metal workable into art."<sup>46</sup> As for the critic, he performs a useful service merely by the fact that his errors are of a different kind from the last, leading

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41. U.P.U.C., p. 74.

42. *Ibid*, p. 152.

43. *Ibid*, p. 106.

44. *Ibid*, p. 109.

45. *Ibid*, p. 141.

46. *Ibid*, p. 109.

in this way, to greater amount of correction. Hence, Eliot declares:—

“The uses of poetry certainly vary as society alters, as the public to be addressed, changes.”<sup>47</sup>

The sociological interest, which Eliot evinces in poetry leads him to a sort of didacticism:—

“The rudiment of criticism is the ability to select a good poem and reject a bad poem; and its most severe test is of its ability to select a good new poem, to respond properly to a new situation.”<sup>48</sup>

It is this very interest again, which makes Eliot proclaim Wordsworth superior to Landor. He states in categorical terms a new principle:—

“And in estimating for ourselves the greatness of a poet we have to take into account also the history of his greatness. Wordsworth is an essential part of history: Landor only a magnificent by-product.”<sup>49</sup>

Eliot's assessment of Arnold contains some of his most significant and universally accepted pronouncements. They are the fine pieces of pure literary criticism. For example, his concept of **Auditory Imagination** is the best and the noblest contribution of this period. Apart from this, his re-iteration of critic's duty “to review the past of literature, and set the poets and the poems in a new order”<sup>50</sup> gives a new colour to the complexion of his literary criticism. In the same essay, he makes another equally important observation pertaining to the responsibility of the exhaustive critic. It is: to bring to light and thus to focus interest on the literary greatness of poets, hitherto regarded as minor ones. The passage is worth-quot-ing and runs as follows:—

“The exhaustive critic, armed with a powerful glass, will be able to sweep the distance, and gain an acquaintance with minute objects in landscape with which to compare minute objects close at hand.”<sup>51</sup>

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47. U.P.U.C., p. 150.

48. *Ibid*, p. 18.

49. *Ibid*, p. 88.

50. *Ibid*, p. 108.

51. *Ibid*.



He reasserts the question of order and deems it necessary on the part of more independent critics to accomplish this task:—

“The majority of critics can be expected only to parrot the opinions of the last master of criticism; among more independent minds a period of destruction, of preposterous over-estimation and of successive fashions takes place, until a new authority comes to introduce some order.”<sup>52</sup>

Criticising Arnold for the lack of virtues of poetic style, Eliot makes one of the most laudable of pronouncements on “auditory imagination”:—

“What I call the ‘auditory imagination’ is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, and current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilised mentality.”<sup>53</sup>

Eliot defines “auditory imagination” as “a feeling for syllable and rhythm.” It is not an ordinary feeling. It must have two attributes: first, to penetrate, far below into the conscious level of thought; and second, to invigorate each word, used by the poet. Such a feeling, to Eliot, works through meanings certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense. But its main functions in either case is to fuse together every type of mentality—the old, the new, the most ancient and the most civilized.

Eliot’s rhetorical phraseology has made the contents of the passage, somewhat difficult to understand. What he means, is the appropriate use of diction, not only in its pure literal meaning, but also in its emotional context. The stress on the syllable and rhythm not only as conceived, but felt also, means that the poet must incorporate into his poetry, the quality of music—music which moves the readers even on an un-

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52. U.P.U.C., p. 109.

53. *Ibid*, p. 118.

conscious plane. Again, the musical stress should not be taken to mean, mere melody separated from the actual meaning or sense of the poem. Melody is just one of its component parts and nothing more than that.<sup>54</sup> Lastly, the underlying purpose behind such an imaginative activity of the poet is to appeal people of every intellectual standard and taste, the common and the uncommon, alike.

It is in this context that Eliot implores the poets to approach the avenues, provided by the common speech. "The music of poetry", he says, "is the music latent in the common speech of its time." He further clarifies the position and reaffirms:

"Of course, we do not want the poet merely to reproduce exactly the conversational idiom of himself, his family, his friends, and his particular district; but what he finds there is the material out of which he must make his poetry. He must, like the sculptor, be faithful to the material in which he works; it is out of sounds that he has heard that he must make his melody and harmony."<sup>55</sup>

The conversational idiom, so to say, is to furnish material to the poet, out of which, he is to recreate his poetic diction. His function is that of a sculptor. It means, he is to recast, reconstruct and if need be, reshape the words, accounting of course, for the sounds, which he himself has heard. This done, the poet can bring melody and harmony into the poem. We should guard against one misunderstanding which is likely to arise and that is, that his insistence on the pattern of sound should not be taken to mean a pattern, separated from the sense in any way. In his view the two patterns are indissoluble and one.<sup>56</sup> The musical quality springs from both the elements—sound as well as sense—one illiterative and the other, perceptive. To put it in another way, this indissoluble harmony of sound and sense, constitute what Eliot calls "the music of a word." He explains:—

"The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately pre-

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54. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 31.

55. *Ibid*, p. 32.

56. *Ibid*, p. 33.

ceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association."<sup>57</sup>

Which means that the poet must concentrate on the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure. He must be very cautious about the most appropriate use of a word, its contextual meaning and associational significance. His ear must be sensitive to the tones and overtones of words as his mind is to the association of ideas and images. The poet, in nutshell, must be a craftsman in the use of words.

The foregoing discussion reveals that the feeling for rhythm and syllable, the capacity to create verbal melody out of common speech, the emotional width of vocabulary and the discriminatory power to make its appropriate use are the main qualities which constitute "auditory imagination" in the poet. There may be poets who struggle to bring the language of poetry nearer to that of the common speech, as also those who attempt to create for poetry a more elaborate diction unfettered by colloquial speech. Auditory imagination may show itself in either way.<sup>58</sup> Chaucer and Spenser, display this faculty in abundance. Pope, though a great artist, is yet very poor in this respect. It is by virtue of "auditory imagination" that Shakespeare excels and surpasses all other English poets. He plays in the great ocean of words as buoyantly as "Cleopatra's dolphins."<sup>59</sup> Eliot's own praise of Shakespeare for the same qualities is significant:—

"The recreation of word and image which happens fitfully in the poetry of such a poet as Coleridge happens almost incessantly with Shakespeare. Again and again, in his use of a word, he will give a new meaning or extract a latent one; again and again, the right imagery, saturated while it lay in the depths of Shakespeare's memory, will rise like Anadyomene from the sea."<sup>60</sup>

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57. O.P.P., p. 33.

58. Gardner Helen—*The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p. 5.

59. *Ibid*, p. 6.

60. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 147.

Eliot, at this stage, touches another important aspect of literary value—the question, what is poetry? In the introduction to *The Use of Criticism*,<sup>61</sup> he makes a cursory review of the whole question. He does not furnish any “academic definition” of poetry but examines its various aspects in relation to what he calls “the experience and appreciation of poetry.”<sup>62</sup> Eliot views the entire perspective of the question from a definite angle. He affirms that the poet communicates an experience—experience which is not ordinary and personal but composite and impersonal, ordered out of many experiences of the poet. But the reality of the poem he asserts is not simply the reality of what the poet is trying to express or convey his own experience of writing it. It is not even the experience of the reader or of the writer as a reader. He states that the poem’s existence is somewhere “between the writer and the reader.” Hence, “a poem is not just either what the poet “planned” or what the reader “conceives.”<sup>64</sup>

In his essay on Dante, written in 1929, Eliot says that the experience of a poem is the experience of a moment and of a life time. The experience of a moment is unique and may be of shock, surprise or terror. As one outgrows, majority of such experiences remain only on a subconscious plane, forming part of a larger whole of experiences. But there may be some poems which impart experience of a long time—experience that cannot be erased. In this connection, Eliot quotes Dante’s poems as examples. What Eliot implies may be best elaborated from his references to Shakespeare.

“Shakespeare too was occupied with the struggle—which alone constitutes life for a poet—to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal.”<sup>65</sup>

He continues:—

“the great poet, in writing himself, writes his time.”<sup>66</sup>

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61. U.P.U.C., Introduction.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

65. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 29.

66. *Ibid.*

He concludes:—

“Thus, Dante, hardly knowing it, became the voice of eighteenth century; Shakespeare hardly knowing it became the representative of the end of the sixteenth century.”<sup>67</sup>

Eliot, in all these references, is repeating the same assertion that a poet, no doubt, is communicating his own experiences, but they are ordered in such a way as to appear impersonal and universal. The poem, thus, is embodying a “new-art-experience” and the poet is making conscious efforts towards this end. His greatness lies in his power of transmuting personal experiences into something “rich and strange, something universal and impersonal.” Such a poet becomes the representative of his age, not knowingly, but unknowingly because in writing himself, he writes his time.

Reverting back to the fundamental nature of poetry, Eliot reaffirms that the question “what is poetry issued quite naturally from our experience of our poems.”<sup>68</sup> But this experience is not of the same type, or of the same standard, even in the case of a single poem. It may vary from reader to reader. The reason lies in one’s standard of maturity and sensibility. It is here that Eliot favours “wide and increasingly discriminating reading.”<sup>69</sup> Such study would develop the sensibility of readers and in turn would check them, being taken in by the “sham and adulterate in its own time.”<sup>70</sup> He makes another observation which is equally significant. According to him, the experience of poetry, as it develops in the conscious and more mature person, is not merely the sum of the experiences of good poems:<sup>71</sup> it is more than that. It requires alteration and modification through a process of organisation of those experiences which he calls “education in poetry.”<sup>72</sup> An adolescent reader experiences a sort of passing infatuation for a certain kind of poetry. The reason for this is not merely that the

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67. S.P., p. 29.

68. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 19.

69. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 37.

70. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 18.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*

sensibility at this age is keener than maturity. What happens is a kind of inundation, or invasion of the undeveloped personality by the "stronger mind of the poet."<sup>73</sup> But in the course of time, and with an advanced age, maturity and multiplicity of his poetic experiences, the element of enjoyment, according to Eliot, is enlarged into appreciation, adding thus, a new dimension of intellectual intensity or feeling. He refers to this as the second stage in our understanding of poetry.<sup>74</sup> At this stage, one is no longer interested in the selection or the rejection of poems but becomes engaged in a different process—the process of organisation. Eliot's reorganisation—alludes to the third stage of appreciation wherein the reader is involved in something new in poetry which he comes across in the form of a new pattern of poetry. Now the poem assumes wide proportions and has its own existence apart from the reader. As a result, the reader becomes equipped with a faculty to distinguish between various degrees of greatness in poetry.<sup>75</sup>

Enumerating difficulties, which account for the unintelligibility and obscurity in poetry and hence, for the hindrance caused in the way of its proper appreciation, Eliot says forthrightly that the chief use of the "meaning of a poem in the ordinary sense may be "to satisfy one habit of the reader and to keep his mind diverted and quiet."<sup>76</sup> In his opinion, the poem, irrespective of its meaning, leaves its impact on the seasoned reader.<sup>77</sup> He cites his own example:—

"The more seasoned reader, he who has reached in these matters, state of greater purity, does not bother about understanding; not, at least, at first. I know that some of the poetry to which I am most devoted is poetry which I did not understand at first reading; some is poetry which I am not sure I understand yet: for instance Shakespeare's."<sup>78</sup>

What Eliot implies by these remarks is the natural character of poetry. He is against every sort of superfluity. He

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73. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 37.

74. *Ibid*, p. 49.

75. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 34.

76. *Ibid*, p. 151.

77. *Ibid*, p. 152.

78. *Ibid*.

suggests to all readers of poetry to "take the poem as they find" and implores the poets to "write as they can." Any studied attempt to compose poetry or forced effort to discern meanings in a poem is, unwanted. Eliot feels that it is not possible for the reader to translate into words, the experience of poetry. It can be done only to a partial degree. Even if a person knows a poem to be good, still, he may not be able to explain its reasons. But, to critics, he declares categorically:—

"In order to analyse the enjoyment and appreciation of a good poem; the critic must have experienced the enjoyment and he must convince us of his taste."<sup>79</sup>

Since 1932, Eliot's criticism shows a greater concern for highlighting the literary misuses of personality, as against the earlier one, where the stress is on the positive value of impersonality. We have already discussed the critics' period of transition from *The Sacred Wood* to *After Strange Gods* and some of its far-reaching implications. Barring his essay on Yeats, in 1940, Eliot is continuously exposing the cult of personality. In his assessment of *The Age of Dryden; Wordsworth; Coleridge; Shelley; Keats and Arnold*, he is attacking the same point.

Eliot calls Wordsworth and Coleridge, "the two most original poetic minds of their generation."<sup>80</sup> He shows his dislike of Coleridge for too much metaphysical interests and criticises him, for "the sudden, fitful and terrifying kind of inspiration",<sup>81</sup> he suffered from. He discusses the poet-critic vis-a-vis two main points: first, Coleridge's doctrine of fancy and imagination; and second, where both made a common cause together—the Theory of Poetic Diction.

In Eliot's view, the theory of poetic diction—the stress on the very language of men implied a kind of "revolt against a whole social order."<sup>82</sup> He feels that any radical change in

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79. U.P.U.C., p. 17.

80. *Ibid*, p. 70.

81. *Ibid*, p. 69.

82. *Ibid*, p. 25.

poetic form is likely to be the symptom of some very much deeper change in society and the individual.<sup>83</sup> He believes that Wordsworth's occupation is not simply with "the reform of the language." Instead, he was pre-occupied with "its very revolution."<sup>84</sup> He also affirms that the language of Wordsworth is artificial, turgid and no more capable of naturalness than that of Pope."<sup>85</sup> As far as the theory of poetic diction goes, Eliot declares that "no serious critic could disapprove."<sup>86</sup>

Eliot shows his disagreement with Wordsworth's definition of poetry and says:—

"It will not do to talk of 'emotions recollected in tranquillity', which is only one poet's account of his recollection of his own methods."<sup>87</sup>

Eliot does not agree with Coleridge's distinction between Fancy and Imagination:—

Coleridge has defined:—

"The Primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the finite I am."<sup>88</sup>

"The Secondary Imagination, I consider as an echo of the former. . . . It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create. . . ."<sup>89</sup>

"Fancy has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definitives. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space."<sup>90</sup>

Eliot joins hands with Prof. I. A. Richards<sup>91</sup> to point out the baffling complexities of the passage and contends:—

"There is so much memory in imagination that if you are to distinguish between imagination and fancy in Coleridge's way

83. U.P.U.C., p. 75.

84. *Ibid*, p. 26.

85. *Ibid*.

86. *Ibid*, p. 74.

87. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. ix.

88. U.P.U.C., p. 77.

89. *Ibid*.

90. *Ibid*, p. 77.

91. Richards, I. A.—*Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 191.



you must define the difference between memory in imagination and memory in fancy; and it is not enough to say that the one "dissolves, diffuses and dissipates" the memories in order to recreate, whilst the other deals with fixities and definites."<sup>92</sup>

He criticises Coleridge for his theory of "willing suspension of disbelief" and states that the latter, no doubt, "was noting an important fact, but not quite in the happiest terms."<sup>93</sup> He assigns two reasons for this; first, one is not aware of a disbelief; and second, if so, none is voluntarily suspending it.

Eliot, in his final analysis refers to the criticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge as the criticism of an age of change.<sup>94</sup> In his view, the best in Coleridge's criticism seems to come "from his own delicacy and subtlety of insight as he reflected upon his own experience of writing poetry."<sup>95</sup> He feels that of the two poets as critics "Wordsworth knew better, what he was about."<sup>96</sup> He assigns him the highest place because of "the critical insight which Wordsworth displays in his poetry and in his Preface",<sup>97</sup>—the insight which he qualifies as symptomatic of a "profound spiritual revival."<sup>98</sup> He praises the two critics for what he finds in them, "the expression of a totality of unified interest."<sup>99</sup>

The concluding line in the lecture on Arnold is highly instructive. It may be taken as a key to the working of Eliot's mind during the early thirties. Therein, Eliot refers to a new phenomenon—a phenomenon which not only in the case of Arnold but also in his own case, is amply borne out by relevant facts. He concludes:—

"A man's theory of the place of poetry is not independent of his view of life in general."<sup>100</sup>

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92. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 79.

93. *Ibid*, p. 95.

94. *Ibid*, p. 81.

95. *Ibid*, p. 80.

96. *Ibid*.

97. *Ibid*.

98. *Ibid*.

99. *Ibid*, p. 81.

100. *Ibid*, p. 119.

Eliot does not see eye to eye with Arnold when the latter inter-relates Poetry, Life and Morals.<sup>101</sup> Arnold's assertion: "A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life", in Eliot's view, "is going to upset and disturb literary values."<sup>102</sup> According to him, the statements such as, "Poetry is the reality, philosophy the illusion" display Arnold's obsession to "find out a substitute for religious faith."<sup>103</sup> Eliot continues the attack and says:—

"To ask of poetry, that it gives religious and philosophic satisfaction, while, deprecating philosophy and dogmatic religion, is of course to embrace the shadow of a shade."<sup>104</sup>

He criticises Arnold's definition of poetry as "criticism of life":—

"No phrase than 'criticism of life' can sound more frigid to anyone who has felt the full surprise and elevation of a new experience of poetry."<sup>105</sup>

He reacts at the other counterpart of the definition—the prefix—and ridicules the very idea:—

"At bottom: that is a great way down; the bottom is the bottom. At the bottom of the abyss, is what few ever see, and what those cannot bear to look at for long; and it is not a criticism of life."<sup>106</sup>

Arnold's whole literary outlook, according to Eliot, is conditioned by his own mental make-up. First, he is neither a reactionary nor a revolutionary.<sup>107</sup> Secondly, his notion of life is not so deep.<sup>108</sup> Thirdly, being conservative, he tends to become a reformer. Fourthly, to use his own phrase Arnold "did not know enough."<sup>109</sup> And lastly, he was not Dryden or Dr. Johnson; he was an Inspector of Schools and became Pro-

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101. U.P.U.C., p. 103.

102. *Ibid*, p. 116.

103. *Ibid*, p. 113.

104. *Ibid*, p. 118.

105. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. ix.

106. *Ibid*.

107. *Ibid*, p. 103.

108. *Ibid*.

109. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C.; Arnold, p. 104.

fessor of Poetry. The resultant effect is that "the use to which he puts poetry remains limited." In the words of Eliot, Arnold became so conscious of what, for him, poetry was *for*, that he could not altogether see it for what *it is*.<sup>110</sup>

And this is perhaps the border line between Eliot and Arnold separating them in their creative and critical efforts. Prof. F. O. Matthiessen has focussed our attention on the same point:—

"The chief difference separating in quality both their criticism and verse is suggested in Eliot's remark that Arnold's poetry has little *technical interests*."<sup>111</sup>

Eliot alludes to another vital weakness in Arnold. He criticises Arnold for defining criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to view the best that is known and thought in the world." He contends:—

"The 'disinterested endeavour to know' is only a prerequisite of the critic, and is not criticism, which may be the result of such an endeavour."<sup>112</sup>

He continues:—

"Arnold states the work of the critic merely in terms of the personal ideal, an ideal for oneself—and an ideal for one self is not disinterested."<sup>113</sup>

Eliot's whole criticism of Arnold is streamlined from a particular angle. Arnold is too academic and sometimes personal. His poetry displays "little technical interest."<sup>114</sup> He tells us little or nothing about his experiences of composing poetry.<sup>115</sup> Arnold, unlike Eliot, shows no concern with poetry from a "maker's point of view"<sup>116</sup>—the view, which in Eliot, is the starting point of all his critical activity.

Eliot praises Tennyson for the excellence of technical interest which he found lacking in Arnold. He affirms that

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110. U.P.U.C., p. 118.

111. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievements of T. S. Eliot*, p. 7.

112. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 43.

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

115. *Ibid.*

116. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Tennyson's "variety of metrical accomplishment is astonishing."<sup>117</sup> Tennyson displays three qualities—abundance, variety and competence—which, according to Eliot, are seldom found together, except in the "greatest poets."<sup>118</sup> He considers Tennyson's technical competence masterly and satisfying and refers to "In Memoriam" as "the most unapproachable of all his poems."<sup>119</sup> He calls the poem unique and full of great poetry, known for its economy of words and a universal emotion related to a particular place.

In Eliot's view, "In Memoriam" is a religious poem, but for reasons, different to those assigned by the contemporaries of the poet. They had regarded the poem as a message of hope and reassurance to their rather fading-christian-faith. Eliot asserts that it is not religious because of the quality of its faith, but because of the quality of its doubt. Its faith is a poor thing but its doubt is a very intense experience.<sup>120</sup> Eliot feels that in Tennyson, one comes across a sort of an interesting compromise between religious attitude and belief in human perfectibility. According to him, Tennyson was not complacent towards the fundamental changes, which Industrialization and the rise of mercantile classes, aimed at. Justifying the poet for the spirit of "In Memoriam" Eliot states an important literary point:—

"It happens now and then that a poet by some strange accident expresses the mood of his generation, at the same time that he is expressing a mood of his which is quite remote from that of his generation."<sup>121</sup>

Eliot analyses the whole temperament of the poet as also of the age. In his opinion, the poet's feelings were more honest than his mind. The age was such that had no hold on permanent things—on permanent truths about man, God, life and death. The poet also stirred about with his time and became confirmist. The best he could do was to hold fast

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117. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 166.

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

to his "unique and unerring feeling for the sounds of words."<sup>122</sup> Eliot foresees an intimate relation between the surface of words, on the one hand, and their deep significance, on the other. Peeping through its innocence, one can discern its inmost depths—to the abyss of sorrow. Hence, he declares:—

"Tennyson is not only a minor Virgil, he is also with Virgil as Dante saw him, a Virgil among the Shades, the saddest of all English poets, among the Great in Limbo, the most instinctive rebel against the society in which he was the most perfect confirmist."<sup>123</sup>

The lecture on Yeats,<sup>124</sup> delivered by Eliot, before the Friends of the Irish Academy in 1940, occupies a privileged place in the development of Eliot's literary criticism. The reasons are: first, it contains some of his best critical observations; and second, in this very lecture, Eliot improves upon his earlier views vis-a-vis "extinction of personality," in art. The improvement, appearing as it does in the wake of a period, wherein Eliot had displayed so much interest in censuring the use of personality, assumes greater significance. The passage, being of much import, is quoted at full length:—

"Now among all the poems in Yeats' earlier volumes, I find only in a line here or there that sense of a unique personality which makes one sit up in excitement and eagerness to learn more about the author's mind and feelings. The intensity of Yeats' own emotional experience hardly appears. We have sufficient evidence of the intensity of experience of his youth, but it is from the retrospections in some of his later work that we have our evidence."<sup>125</sup>

Eliot has criticised the earlier poetry of Yeats for the lack of what he calls that "sense of unique personality", which generates in the mind of the reader, a process of an excited curiosity for knowing something more of the mind of the author. He has shown his instinctive appreciation for his later poetry—poetry, which incorporates in it, the greater expression of his personality. This is a stand quite different to the one, Eliot has been advocating for the last 20 years. In

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122. S.P., p. 173.

123. *Ibid.*

124. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

"Tradition and the Individual Talent", he has emphatically stood for "a continual extinction of personality."<sup>126</sup> While appreciating Yeats, he seems to have realised the flaw in his earlier position. He readily confesses his fault and gives a better interpretation of his idea of personality.

But Eliot is also alive to the implied contradiction in his new position. He comments:—

"It may seem that, in giving as a reason, for the superiority of Yeats' later work, the greater expression of personality in it, I am contradicting myself."<sup>127</sup>

He offers his own explanation:—

"It may be that I expressed myself badly or that I had only an abolescent grasp of that idea—as I can never bear to re-read my prose writings."<sup>128</sup>

Without commenting on the tenability of the explanation, let us pass on to what Eliot thinks now, "the truth of the matter":<sup>129</sup>

"There are two forms of impersonality: that which is natural to the mere skilful craftsman and that which is more and more achieved by the maturing craftsman."<sup>130</sup>

But the most significant point is the one he advances by way of an elaboration of the second type of impersonality:—

"The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol."<sup>131</sup>

In spite of the present shift, Eliot's stress on impersonality as a principle, still remains uncontestable. It is sometimes difficult to characterise his basic attitude. He starts theorising about impersonality in relation to human emotions, and gets himself involved in its complications. He sees poetry as a release from interior oppressions as also a vehicle of their

126. S.P., p. 25.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

128. *Ibid.*

129. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 189.

130. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

131. *Ibid.*

dramatisation. He wants discontinuity of life with art and advocates its continuity as well. In his present stand, he harps on impersonality but visualises a state where the poet is expected to retain all the particularities of his "own experience." The correct position, which Eliot is advocating in 1940, appears to be a sort of golden mean established between the ideal of impersonality on the one extreme and a total extinction of personality, on the other. His stress is the same but its nature is revised. The impersonality, as envisaged now, is not the earlier one, totally divorced from the personal experiences of the poet, but one where the poet is expected to retain the identity of his own experience. Perhaps, Eliot by now, has come to realise that an absolute negation of personality is not possible. It may be a laudable aim but its virtual achievement is negated by many practical limitations that are beyond human control.

Another important observation of equal intrinsic worth which Eliot makes in his discussion of Yeats' personality is the exclusive passion and integrity with which he serves the end of art. Commenting on the literary influence of Yeats, he says:—

"Yeats' would not have this influence, had he not become a great poet; but the influence of which I speak is due to the figure of the poet himself, to the integrity of his passion for his art and his craft which provided such an impulse for his extraordinary development."<sup>132</sup>

Eliot is introducing here a new dimension of art. He links the integrity of the passion within the poet to the impulse of his development without. The impulse for continual development, therefore, provides to an artist, an incentive to care more for art than for his own reputation. It is in this context that Eliot asserts that "art was greater than the artist."<sup>133</sup> Yeats' success lies in the fact that he served the Muse with an unconditional zeal and interest. He became unquestionably the master but always remains the contemporary. That accounts for the secret of his influence and popularity.

Eliot suggests that an artist ought to develop in himself

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132. S.P., p. 187.

133. *Ibid.*

the habit of hard work and concentration. Supported by what he specifically mentions "the force of character", he can proceed like Dickens to such masterpieces as "Bleak House", which the author could bring out even in his middle age.<sup>134</sup> By "the force of character", Eliot means the character of the "artist as artist."<sup>135</sup> It is a kind of moral and intellectual "excellence."<sup>136</sup> Again, it is in this context—the context of continual development of the artist—that Eliot demands an exceptional honesty and courage from such artist to "face any change."<sup>137</sup> Otherwise, most men either cling to their experience of youth, turning their works into "insincere mimicries"<sup>138</sup> or leave their passion behind, forcing them to write merely "from the head."<sup>139</sup> Therefore, Eliot while discussing Yeats—a poet, displaying continuity of purpose and personality—displays a new method of critical evaluation. The directions he provides, are important:—

"Where, there is the continuity of such a positive personality and such a single purpose, the later work cannot be understood, or properly enjoyed, without the study and the appreciation of the earlier; and the later work again reflects light upon the earlier; and shows us beauty and significance not before perceived. We have also to take account of the historical conditions."<sup>140</sup>

It means that Eliot is recommending here, the evaluation of the work of a major writer as an organic whole. In his view, it cannot, and should not be assessed piece-meal. The different periods of its creation, their historical sequence and the relative state of maturity of the author, must also be taken into account, in order to attain, full, rightful and objective evaluation of the artist. By "historical conditions", Eliot indirectly suggests literary environment seen through the perspective of history. He cites the example of Yeats, who was born

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134. S.P., p. 187.

135. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

136. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

137. *Ibid.*

138. *Ibid.*

139. *Ibid.*

140. *Ibid.*, p. 192.



into the end of a literary movement. Yeats has before him absolutely no tradition of verse-play. He has to struggle very hard. His early attempts, even though imperfect as they appear, are in Eliot's view "more permanent literature than the plays of Ibsen or of Shaw."<sup>141</sup> It is through him, that the idea of the poetic drama is kept alive, which to Eliot, is the starting point of our greatest debt towards him. Where does this point end, Eliot does not know: Until, perhaps when drama itself ends. The concluding part of Eliot's discussion of Yeats is significantly instructive, in as far as it de-limits the artist's mental poise in relation to various literary trends, in which he is to work. He reiterates:—

"Born into a world in which the doctrine of "Art for Art's sake" was generally accepted, and living on into one, in which art has been asked to be instrumental to social purposes, he held firmly to the right view which is between these, though not in any way a compromise between them, and showed that any artist, by serving his art with entire integrity, is at the same time rendering the greatest service he can to his own nation and to the whole world."<sup>142</sup>

We have discussed at length the development of Eliot's literary criticism in the thirties. The discussion reveals certain broad and salient features. There is a systematic shift from the epistemological interest to that of the metaphysical one. A new socio-religious strain is appended. The stress on autonomy of poetry is shifted to its ultimate sanctions and considerations. The concept of Tradition, vis-a-vis, poet as "medium" is reoriented. A new code of orthodox sensibility,—dictated and guided by Christian morals—is introduced.

To try to give judgment on whether or not Eliot's critical faculty suffered on account of his socio-religious bias, appears unwarranted for the purpose of present chapter. The bias, its Christian character in particular, has been deprecated even by Eliot's own admirers. Whatever the case may be, in the years that follow, we see him laying a much greater emphasis on this aspect.

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141. S.P., p. 193.

142. *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, Eliot's sharp and critical mind has displayed, even in this period, some of his best and profoundest ponderings into the realm of literary criticism. **The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism** may be recognised as the ablest treatise of the period. His criticism of Coleridge's theory of Imagination; his support to Wordsworthian concept of diction; and his appreciation of Tennyson's artistic perfection, are some of his noble contributions. But his plea of auditory imagination is, perhaps, the noblest of all.

It must be remembered that in Eliot's criticism, the literary values remain basically the same. Rather, they appear to be unaffected. His emphases on the sovereignty of poetry; theory of Tradition; and Impersonality of art remain constant.

The discussion on Yeats incorporates a policy of revision in Eliot's view of impersonality. The revised view displays much balance and deeper understanding of the whole issue. He sees literature in a new perspective. The complexion of impersonality in art undergoes a radical change. Though intrinsically the concept remains the same, yet its contents are not to remain completely divorced from author's personality. The aim, now, is not their depersonalisation but universalisation. In Eliot's 'development as a critic, Yeats' evaluation marks the end of an era as also the beginning of a new one. It is the end, since Eliot begins to see literature in a new perspective. It is the beginning, because it provides a key to the understanding of the maturing phase of his literary criticism.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LAST PHASE

In passing through the forties and entering into the evening of Eliot's life, we reach the last phase in the development of his literary criticism. As already stated, the address on Yeats, in 1940, wherein he modifies his former stand on extinction of personality, marks the beginning of a new era—the era of greater maturity and objectivity in art and in its evaluation. Now, he does not speak with that adolescent enthusiasm of the earlier period. His critical writings become marked by wider interest, greater wisdom and deeper understanding.

Looking back at his own critical output in 1961, Eliot refers to its lapses with a sense of humility, unprecedented perhaps in any of the major critics:—

“There are errors of judgment, and what I regret more, there are errors of tone: the occasional note of arrogance, of vehemence, of cocksureness or rudeness, the braggadocio of the mild-mannered man safely entrenched behind his type-writer. Yet I must acknowledge my relationship to the main, who made those statements, and in spite of all these exceptions, I continue to identify myself with the author.”<sup>1</sup>

The confession has been made publicly. It amply shows that Eliot is alive to the adolescent nature of his views, expressed earlier. He even goes a step further and declares with an equal degree of modesty that there are statements the meaning of which he no longer understands.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this, Eliot's acknowledgment that he continues to identify himself with the author, demonstrates his character which he so ardently advocates for the Artist, in his appreciation of Yeats.<sup>3</sup> All such

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1. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 14.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 191.

confessions vindicate the sincerity and integrity, working behind the critic in Eliot.

Before taking up a detailed discussion of the literary criticism of the last phase, let us clearly understand, first of all, its general nature. Its complexion, in the main, is socio-religious. The moral strain, which the thirties appended to Eliot's critical approach, gets further emphasis and strength. The reason is, not that, Eliot has embraced Christianity, but because he sincerely feels the inevitability of the approach itself. He explains:—

“In our own day, the influence of psychology and of sociology upon literary criticism has been very noticeable. On the one hand, those influences of social discipline have enlarged the field of the critic, and have affirmed, in a world, which otherwise is inclined to depreciate the importance of literature, the relations of literature, of life. But from another point of view, this enrichment has also been an impoverishment, for the purely literary values, the appreciation of good writing for its own sake, have become submerged when literature is judged in the light of other considerations.”<sup>4</sup>

The passage, once again, registers an important confession. Eliot agrees that divergent interests which a critic has to cater to in modern times, have impoverished “purely literary values.” The Socio-psychological context has no doubt widened the area of criticism but it has surely eclipsed its purity. Eliot does not suggest any way out of the impasse, thus created. He simply explains the circumstances and says that the conditions under which literature is judged simply and naturally as literature and not another thing, no longer prevail.<sup>5</sup> In his view, for such normal judgments to be given by the critic, a settled society, definite public, limited number of reading class and a small minority, capable of taste and discrimination are essential. Moreover, such class or people ought to have faith in themselves and the area of differences—political, social, religious or otherwise—must be small.<sup>6</sup> The modern society, as it stands

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4. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 191.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

divorced from one or all of these conditions, cannot claim to have criticism which is pure and simple in the normal sense. Making a categorical statement on the point, in 1961, he reiterates:—

“I have suggested, also, that it is impossible to fence off literary criticism from criticism on other grounds; and that moral, religious and social judgments cannot be wholly excluded.”<sup>7</sup>

He continues with the same force:—

“That they can, and that literary merit can be estimated in complete isolation, is the illusion of those who believe that literary merit alone can justify the publication of a book which could otherwise be condemned on moral grounds.”<sup>8</sup>

Eliot's position is more than clear. He takes for granted that moral, social and religious judgments are part of literary criticism. They cannot be wholly excluded. He censures those who think in terms of pure literary criticism. In his view, it is nothing but an illusion. He goes as far as to state that literary merit alone, cannot justify the publication of a book. While accounting for that, its moral aspect is also a pre-condition.

In discussing Yeats, Eliot raised an important literary principle—the continuity of the personality of the artist<sup>9</sup>—which is equally applicable to Eliot's own development. Raising the point, he had pleaded for the evaluation of such writers and their works, not in terms of their isolated periods, but as an integral whole. The reason he assigned was that each period has a relative and a subterranean role to play in flowering the latent faculties of the artist. The same holds true of Eliot also. A piece-meal study of his criticism is neither possible; nor can it lead to its objective and full understanding. Whatever he initiates, pronounces or develops in his early career, cannot be properly followed, in case, it is divorced from the subsequent modifications he has gone to make. Similarly, his latest criticism, again, is in direct sequence of that, what he proposes to accomplish in the beginning. For the purpose of

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7. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 25.

8. *Ibid*, p. 26.

9. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 192.

a comprehensive study of Eliot's literary criticism, what is needed, is a total approach. Maybe, his critical activity is spread over to more than four decades of voluminous production, yet it stands as one piece and looks like an organic whole.

But we must guard against the misgiving that Eliot, at the very outset of his career as a literary critic, had sketched out a design for a massive critical structure and also that, he spent the rest of his life, filling in the details and colours. Eliot himself removes such a misunderstanding.<sup>10</sup> He classifies his own essays into two categories: Essays of generalisation and appreciations of individual authors. He feels that it is the latter category which seems to have the best chance of retaining some value for the future.<sup>11</sup> Speaking of the value of his own phrases—phrases that gained so much of currency—Eliot makes an important point:—

“But I prophesy that if my phrases are given consideration, a century hence, it will be only in their historical context, by scholars interested in the mind of my generation.”<sup>12</sup>

The reference, to “the historical context”, is significant. It is not the same thing which Eliot elaborates as “historical sense” in his essay on **“Tradition and Individual Talent.”**

The twin phrases stand divided by a distance of forty-two years. In his essay on Yeats, Eliot has referred to historical conditions in which an author or a critic carries his way through. But, what Eliot actually means by the term “historical context” has been fully explained by him in his essay on **Johnson as Critic and Poet.**<sup>13</sup> He has asserted that in appraising the judgments of any critic of the past, one needs to see him in the context of that age, to try to place oneself at his point of view. It involves a difficult task for the interplay of imagination. The success Eliot feels can be only partial and not complete because of so many factors—the modifications of taste, the changes in sensibility and the state of literature—which might have come to stay in between the intervening

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10. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 14.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 162.

period of the critic and that of the present reader. He cites his own practice of indicating the original date of each essay in order to remind the reader "of the distance of time that separates the author when he wrote it from the author as he is today."<sup>14</sup> What Eliot means, is the role of contextual aspects: the ever-changing maturity of the author; the temporal exigencies occasioned by each essay; and various other influences to which the artist remains exposed and which ultimately condition the final culmination of every creative activity.

In Eliot's view, instead of censuring a critic of the eighteenth century, "for not having a modern, historical and comprehensive appreciation"<sup>15</sup> one must look at him with a sympathetic attitude—an attitude broadly analogous to that of the same period. He agrees that Johnson's point of view is quite different from that of ours. Still, he affirms its positiveness which requires a "vigorous effort of imagination to understand."<sup>16</sup> With this attitude, even certain peculiarities of a critic like Dr. Johnson would acquire new measures of objectivity and appreciation. In this way, the sensibility of an age fettered as it is, with the standards of taste, maturity and capacity of a people, always gives the type and quality of literature they deserve. Any appraisal of a critic of the past, therefore, must be made in accordance with the spirit, sensibility and standards prevalent at the critic's own times rather than that of the person who sets out for evaluation.

Eliot contends that the sensibility of any period in the past is always likely to appear to be more limited than our own.<sup>17</sup> He describes Dr. Johnson's failure to understand rhythm and diction "not through lack of sensibility but through specialization of sensibility."<sup>18</sup> He even goes to the extent of qualifying it as "religious sensibility."<sup>19</sup> According to Eliot, Johnson's deafness of ear stimulated indirectly his sharpness of sensibility to "verbal beauty" in place of "verbal melody."

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14. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 14.

15. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 164.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

Developing his plea further, Eliot emphatically says that within his time, within his range, Dr. Johnson had "as fine an ear as anybody."<sup>20</sup> He passes on to an important generalization and refers to the nature of sensibility in a particular age which may be quite different to that of the preceding or the succeeding age. This difference is of vital significance because it would regulate the whole complexion of a critic's activity. Eliot reduces the area of difference to mere "emphasis on sound or on sense." Elaborating still further the same argument, Eliot makes an important distinction between Dr. Johnson's sensibility and that of the moderns. He says:—

"We forgive much to sound and to image, he forgave much to sense. And to exceed in one direction or the other is to risk mistaking the ephemeral for the permanent."<sup>21</sup>

Eliot's position is worth noting. He is striking a balance between incantation and meaning. Sound and sense, though abstractions, are required to produce their effect in unity. To separate them altogether, means "mistaking the ephemeral for the permanent." "The greatest poetry", he asserts, "passes the most severe examination in both the subjects,"<sup>22</sup> which ultimately brings us to the study of diction in poetry.

Perhaps, no other critic than Eliot has so much furthered the cause of poetic diction. From the very beginning, when he wrote "**Reflections on Verse Libre**", in 1917, he had implored the poets "to hold up to the standards of prose",<sup>23</sup> which comes very near to Ezra Pound's axiomatic exhortation that "poetry ought to be as well written as prose." No doubt, that it is Wordsworth who initiates the debate on "poetic diction", but his own practice in his poetry is often divorced from his own theory. On the other hand, it is Eliot who not only theorises on the diction in poetry but demonstrates also through his poetic practice, the efficacy and the utility of the outlook he so ardently espouses.

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20. O.P.P., p. 169.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

23. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 189.



Eliot believes that any radical change in poetic form is likely to be the symptom of some very much deeper change in society and in the individual.<sup>24</sup> In his view, Wordsworth was occupied not merely with "reform of language but with revolution of language."<sup>25</sup> He considers it mandatory that "poetry must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language."<sup>26</sup> In his essay on "**Goethe as The Sage**", he goes as far as to reiterate:—

"...the true sage is rarer than the true poet; and when the two gifts, that of wisdom and that of poetic speech, are found in the same man, you have the great poet."<sup>27</sup>

And regarding poetic speech, he affirms:—

"Whether poetry is eccentual or syllabic, rhymed or rhymeless, formal or free, it cannot afford to lose its contact with the changing language of common intercourse."<sup>28</sup>

Eliot is putting premium on the language of common intercourse. His stress is on conversation, which is to provide the poet all the avenues needed for what he refers to as "music of poetry." This is exactly what Dante and Goethe have done for their languages. The same was done by Oldham, Waller, Denham, and Dryden. Even Wordsworth aimed at something similar to do. Any poetry, expected to arouse a feeling of excitement and a sense of fulfilment, must have according to Eliot, such a relation to the speech of its own time as to acclaim from the listener or reader, the general comment: "that is how I should talk if I could talk poetry."<sup>29</sup>

Eliot's whole approach to the issue of poetic diction appears to coincide with his theory of Auditory Imagination. He looks at poetry from a particular angle. He subscribes to the view that while poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms, yet it remains all the same, "one person talking to another."<sup>30</sup> More-

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24. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 75.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

26. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 29.

27. O.P.P., p. 207.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

30. *Ibid.*

over, he feels that this is just as true if one sings it; for "singing is another way of talking."<sup>31</sup> The same approach makes him jump to another important statement that extreme differences of opinion between respective critics of poetry arise because of "difference of ear."<sup>32</sup> By ear for poetry, he means an immediate and unified effect of rhythm and diction—both "implying each other."<sup>33</sup> Eliot goes on to assert that the acceptability of a poem and a further interest into its various aspects, depend directly on the favourable impression of rhythm and diction, which again derive their strength from the music of words, latent only in the common speech of the time.<sup>34</sup> In this way, Eliot re-emphasizes the relative worth of colloquial speech. He proceeds with the belief that a spoken language has the inherent potentialities of providing a new poetic medium. Major poets polish and perfect it in one direction or the other so as to give it a new lease of life for the expression of "new objects, new feelings and new aspects."<sup>35</sup>

Closely related to Eliot's conception of poetic diction is his oft-quoted statement that "genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood."<sup>36</sup> What the statement implies is again the musical virtue of poetry. Communication, in this way, is nothing but a preliminary experience, which a reader enjoys at first from a poem. Its meaning at this stage is not essential. It would follow only, if the poem is accepted, otherwise not. Its acceptance, Eliot contends, depends on the musical virtue of the verse which "clothes the absurdities in grandeur, and makes all acceptable."<sup>37</sup> In his view, a poem has its own existence. At the first instance, it is more an experience than a meaning. Hence, Eliot denounces the heresy of paraphrase and suggests that only a part of the mean-

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31. O.P.P., p. 31.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

35. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 15.

36. Eliot, T. S.—*Essays Ancient and Modern*, p. 200.

37. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 167.

ing can be conveyed in this way. It is, because a poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which, "words fail, though meanings exist."<sup>38</sup> Not only this, a poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of them may be different from what the author thought he meant. Eliot raises another point:—

"If we are moved by a poem, it has meant something, perhaps something important, to us; if we are not moved, then it is as poetry meaningless."<sup>39</sup>

Apart from its rhetorical strain, the assertion is valuable in as far as it prescribes a new basis of evaluation. But Eliot, as is usual with him, neither qualifies the capacity of a poem to "move"; nor does he explain its constituent elements. Whether this experience is the same thing that Longinus has elaborated in "*On the Sublime*", is not easy to ascertain. The context, in which the reference occurs, confirms four impressions: first, Eliot is highlighting the value of auditory profuseness of a poem; second, he is interpreting poetry in terms of experience; third, he assigns a primary role to communication and secondary one to understanding; and fourth, the meaning of a poem is not something which exists apart from its musical virtue. In fact, what Eliot suggests is not a discount on meaning but a sort of premium over experience. He deals with the subject on the psychological level. The first requisite of the poem is to move the reader. If it fails to do so, it has no reason to exist. It means, the poem has not been accepted.

Communication and understanding in this sense are two distinct activities. Though they imply each other, yet the two may not function at one and the same time. Unless some ground is prepared by the former, the latter's operation is of no material advantage. It will not be out of place, if we quote Eliot's own experience. He explains that in understanding a piece of prose in a foreign language, he had to be sure of the meaning of each word, and grasp the grammar and its syntax. But in poetry, the case was quite different. It so

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38. O.P.P., p. 30.

39. *Ibid.*

happened, that even if, he did not either construe or translate a piece of poetry, the same conveyed something immediate, vivid and unique—something he could not put into words and yet felt that he understood.<sup>40</sup> And on learning that language better, he found that it was not an illusion but something that was really there. Therefore, he re-asserts:—

“So in poetry you can, now and then penetrate into another country so to speak, before your passport has been issued or your ticket taken.”<sup>41</sup>

As already pointed out, Eliot is vehemently opposed to the heresy of paraphrase. He has discussed the subject at length. The core of his arguments is that the experience of poetry like any other experience is only partially translatable into words. He subscribes to the view of Prof. I. A. Richards that it is never what a poem *says* that matters, but what it *is*.<sup>42</sup> Its different interpretations may be partial formulations of one thing and the ambiguity may be due to the fact that ordinary speech cannot always communicate everything to the extent the poet desires. A poem may mean more than that. Sometimes, it may contain even “much more than the author is aware of.”<sup>43</sup> Eliot is equally against “the diversion of attention from the poetry to either the poet or the knowledge of its springs.”<sup>44</sup> The biographical details he argues, may be necessary for the full knowledge of the poet but are totally irrelevant to our understanding of his poetry.<sup>45</sup> The revelation of various springs from which the poem got its life is not necessarily a help towards its understanding. His plea is, that too much information about the origins of the poem may even break the contact of the reader with it.<sup>46</sup> Referring to his own explanatory notes on *The Waste Land*, Eliot calls them, “the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship.”<sup>47</sup> He denounces

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40. O.P.P., p. 24.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 18.

43. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 31.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

the practice on the ground that it "stimulates the wrong kind of interest among the seekers of sources."<sup>48</sup> He does not feel the necessity of any light upon the poem beyond the radiance shed by the poem itself.<sup>49</sup> The reasons are obvious. Eliot pleads for understanding of "poetry as poetry";<sup>50</sup> and nothing else. Secondly, he maintains that in all great poetry something remains unaccountable, however complete might be the knowledge, either of the poet or the springs of his poems. It is that "what matters most."<sup>51</sup> Thirdly, with the making of the poem, something new happens, something which, in Eliot's view, cannot be wholly explained by "anything that went before."<sup>52</sup>

Eliot does not treat enjoyment and understanding as separate activities.<sup>53</sup> In his view, both are interdependent. He believes that we do not fully understand a poem unless we enjoy it. It is equally true that we do not fully enjoy a poem unless we understand it. The critic's duty, in his opinion, is to help his readers to understand and enjoy.<sup>54</sup> But he warns them not to place isolated emphasis on either of the two. He feels that an emphasis in the extreme would profit no body. An all out reliance on understanding would detract into mere explanation and too much stress on enjoyment would divert one to fall into the subjective and the impressionistic.<sup>55</sup>

He asserts:—

"Thirty-three ago, it seems to have been the latter type of criticism, impressionistic, that had caused the annoyance I felt, when I wrote on *"The Function of Criticism."* Today, it seems to me that we need to be more on guard against the purely explanatory."<sup>56</sup>

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48. O.P.P., p. 110.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

The admission made by Eliot is valuable. It is not an admission of a mere fact only. It also embodies a general principle of aesthetics. It takes us to his oft-repeated generalisation that criticism will reflect from age to age the things that the age demands.<sup>57</sup> But let us shed the misconceived notion that Eliot is all opposition to factual information pertaining to the poet and his age. He concedes that such knowledge may be necessary but only as a "preparatory" help to lead one to the "door of understanding."<sup>58</sup> He asserts that we must find our own way in.<sup>59</sup> Then, it is our own sensibility, intelligence and maturity which would pave the way for such understanding.

In his discussion on Dante,<sup>60</sup> Eliot focusses attention at an important matter—the sources of new poetry. He acknowledges that from Baudelaire, he learnt first the "poetic possibilities" of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis: of the "possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter of fact and the fantastic."<sup>61</sup> Referring in the same context to the combined influence of Baudelaire and Laforgue, he says that through them, he realised that his own adolescent experience of an industrial city in America could form the "material for poetry."<sup>62</sup> As a result, he thought of turning "the hitherto impossible, the sterile and the intractably unpoetic,"<sup>63</sup> into the sources of new poetry. His final generalisation, in this respect, touches an important literary aspect:—

"That, in fact, the business of the poet was to make poetry out of the unexplored resources of the unpoetical; that the poet, in fact, was committed by his profession to turn the unpoetical into poetry."<sup>64</sup>

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57. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 141.

58. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 117.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 126.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*

Eliot expects from the poet to have what he himself calls the "creative eye."<sup>65</sup> A poet must respond properly to each new situation. In his view, a poet is committed to satisfy two obligations: first, to explore the resources of the unpoetical; and second, to make their use in carving poetry out of them. The task of the poet is to help the people comprehend the incomprehensible. He must incorporate into his poetry what he refers to as "the illusion of a view of life."<sup>66</sup> It is for this view, that he praises Dante, Shakespeare, Sapho, Baudelaire and Goethe. He visualises an underlying similarity of approach in Goethe's "healthiness" and Baudelaire's "morbidity."<sup>67</sup> He claims them as men with restless, critical and curious mind—men who understood and foresaw a great deal. The "health" and "melody" they present respectively, is symbolic of the "sense of the age." It is this understanding and foresight which gives them power to explore and exploit the unpoetical into poetry. It is the negation of this understanding that brings rebuke to Matthew Arnold through his oft-quoted imploration that a poet must be able to see beneath, both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom and the horror and the glory."<sup>68</sup> In other words, Eliot is asking the poet to endure the contradictions of human life and depict them so analytically as to present them as part of essential "truth" about "man and the universe." It is this quality which endears Baudelaire to Eliot. He commends his great strength which he qualifies as strength "merely to suffer."<sup>69</sup> The way Baudelaire analyses his own suffering implies for Eliot, the possibility of a "positive state of Beautitude."<sup>70</sup>

"Indeed, in his way of suffering is already a kind of presence of the supernatural and of the superhuman. He rejects always the purely natural and the purely human; in other words he is neither naturalist nor humanist."<sup>71</sup>

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65. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 77.

66. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 51.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

68. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 106.

69. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 177.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Baudelaire, that way, accomplishes something rare and unique. He turns the unpoetical into poetry. The personal at his hands tends to become impersonal. Like a great poet Baudelaire in writing "himself" writes his "own times",<sup>72</sup> a feature so apparent in Dante and Shakespeare, where both are skilfully metamorphosing their personal emotions and feelings.

Before embarking on this chapter, it has been specifically mentioned that Eliot's literary criticism in its last phase is marked by an approach more objective and practical than that of the earlier periods. Now, the critic in Eliot, is always prepared to reconcile or even to accept the viewpoints he had himself vehemently opposed. He acknowledges his own faults and foibles and asks other critics also to "make similar confessions."<sup>73</sup> That, he feels, would stimulate a healthier and much desirable outlook in them. A single statement such as the one that "we cannot escape personal bias in discussing the subject of literary criticism",<sup>74</sup> shows the extent to which, Eliot has withdrawn himself from his former stand.

Looking back at Eliot as the author of "total extinction of personality" in 1919, none could imagine him allowing discount for personal bias, in 1961. But, it may be added that the shift in position has surely enhanced his stature as a critic. It has also appended the much needed degree of plausibility to his theory of Impersonality. Quoting the case of Lady Chatterly,<sup>75</sup> Eliot re-affirms that in literary criticism there are other standards besides that of "literary merit" which cannot be wholly excluded.<sup>76</sup> By "other standards" he surely implies moral, social and religious judgments. All the same, we must bear in mind certain points, pertaining to the stress of his moral strain. In the first instance, though Eliot is out and out a didactic critic, yet his didacticism is never explicit.

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72. S.P., p. 53.

73. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 11.

74. *Ibid*, p. 25.

75. *To Criticise the Critic*, p. 25.

76. *Ibid*.



Secondly, the moral stress in him is not an innovation either of the thirties or of the forties. Even *The Sacred Wood* provides ample indications of his moral concern. Lastly, the nature of this concern is of a particular pattern which should be thoroughly studied.

Eliot's whole outlook is impregnated by Hulme's doctrine of Original sin. The central insight of this philosophy regards man as a limited creature, given to inherent badness. Perfectibility for him is out of reach. He can only accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political. Institutions, therefore, are necessary. Order, in this context, becomes constructive, "liberating and creative." This explains Eliot's concern for a poetry, presenting the illusion of life, set in a particular background. He wants poetry to exhibit the human condition and its significance. It ought to be an actual report of this condition. The genuine duty of the poet is to investigate this actuality from within and from without. Eliot feels that the moral stature of a poem is directly and proportionately connected with the findings of such an investigation. On the personal plane, it is the reality of his own emotions, but on the general human level, it implies a moral and spiritual reality. It is moral and spiritual because it involves a struggle of good and evil, in relation to a permanent human state. It is this emphasis in Eliot which not only responds to the artistic needs, but also becomes the spectrum of an ever increasing ethical concern.

Taken in this light, the moral impact of poetry lies mainly in exhibiting man's metaphysical status. Life, therefore, tends to appear nothing but a mere trial, being carried out under juxtaposed conditions—conditions which none can escape. The business of the artist is to help the people "comprehend the incomprehensible."<sup>77</sup> The extent of his greatness will vary according as he is able to depict the metaphysical reality within or behind the merely human.<sup>78</sup> It is for this reason that he declares Mr. Joyce "the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers";<sup>79</sup> praises Baudelaire for his "theo-

77. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*.

78. Vincent Buckley—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 152.

79. Eliot, T. S.—*After Strange Gods*, p. 38.

logical innocence";<sup>80</sup> calls Dante "the greatest religious poet";<sup>81</sup> and refers to Tennyson's *In Memoriam* a "religious poem"; "not because of its faith but because of the quality of its doubt."<sup>82</sup> He denounces Hardy for his powerful personality uncurbed by any "institutional attachment" or by submission to any "objective beliefs."<sup>83</sup> In fact, the artistic and the ethical concerns in the criticism of Eliot are not separate entities. His evaluation of literature in terms of order, tradition, impersonality and orthodox sensibility, apart from aesthetic considerations, is inspired by the motives of ethical values.

The rehabilitation of Milton and Byron by Eliot is a matter of great importance in the realm of literary criticism. The case of Milton, in particular, is of greater significance. It is on account of three reasons. In the first instance, it calms down an unnecessarily prolonged controversy wherein much heat has been generated. Secondly, it reassigns to Milton, his due place in the hierarchy of the great poets and technicians of the language. Thirdly, in the rehabilitation of Milton, we see Eliot, unhesitatingly withdrawing his earlier adverse observations made against Milton, in 1937.<sup>84</sup>

But, before we take up the issue of Milton, let us consider what Eliot himself has to offer by way of explanation in regard to the alleged recantation of his earlier opinion. He says:—

"But when I wrote my first essay on Milton, I was considering his poetry as poetry and in relation to what I conceived to be the needs of my own time; and when I wrote my second essay on Milton I did not intend it to be, what Desmond MacCarthy and others took it to be, a recantation of my earlier opinion, but a development in view of the fact that there was no longer any likelihood of his being imitated and that therefore he could profitably be studied."<sup>85</sup>

It is not our concern here to doubt the genuineness of

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80. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 176.

81. *Ibid*, p. 95.

82. *Ibid*, p. 172.

83. *Ibid*, p. 184.

84. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 138.

85. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 24.

the justification which Eliot has offered through his explanation. Eliot does not regard the second essay<sup>86</sup> as a recantation of his earlier views. Instead, he thinks it to be a sort of development. The reason he forwards is the possible unlikelihood of his being imitated. As for the views expressed in the first essay, Eliot's position is that he was considering his poetry as poetry and in relation to the needs of his own time—the needs which Eliot has left here undefined. But from a close study of the second essay on Milton, these needs as per Eliot's assessment may be summarized. First, the verse should have the virtues of prose. Second, its diction should become assimilated to cultivate contemporary speech before it is brought up to the elevation of poetry. Third, the subject matter and imagery of poetry should have close affinity to the realities of modern life. Fourth, the poet should incorporate the unpoetic into his poetry and should explore the possibilities of using new words, phrases and expressions such as never used in poetry. In Eliot's view, the study of Milton vis-a-vis these tenets, being of no help, "was only a hindrance."<sup>87</sup>

In the first essay on Milton, Eliot levels against the blind poet, mainly the charge of "peculiar kind of deterioration to which he subjected the language."<sup>88</sup> He recognises Milton's greatness but criticises him for his bad influence. He asserts that there is more of Milton's influence in the badness of the bad verse of the eighteenth century than of anybody's else.<sup>89</sup> The key passage runs thus:—

"And it appears a good deal more serious if we affirm that Milton's poetry could only be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatever. It is more serious, also, if we affirm that Milton's bad influence may be traced much farther than the eighteenth century, and much farther than upon bad poets: if we say that it was an influence against which we still have to struggle."<sup>90</sup>

The last sentence provides ample clues to Eliot's criticism

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86. Eliot T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*. p. 146.

87. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 160.

88. *Ibid*, p. 138.

89. *Ibid*.

90. *Ibid*, p. 139.

of Milton. He confesses himself that in passing these strictures, "he failed to draw a threefold distinction";<sup>91</sup> first, that an influence has been bad in the past; second, that the influence can always be bad; and third, that the contemporary situation being such, Milton as a master should be avoided. Eliot argues that he is no longer prepared to make either of the first two assertions because of the fact that they have no meaning if detached from the third.<sup>92</sup> The exigencies of the contemporary situation have already been discussed. Referring to the bad influence of the poet, Eliot himself exonerates Milton by saying that the burden, if any, lies with the poets who were influenced, rather than with the poet whose work exerted the influence.<sup>93</sup> As far the influence in the remote future, he questions its validity on the ground that none can be certain as to what "good" and "bad" influences would mean in that future.<sup>94</sup>

Another reproach against Milton occurs in the essay on *The Metaphysical Poets*, wherein Eliot has alleged:—

"In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered and this dissociation as is natural was due to the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden."<sup>95</sup>

To this reproach also, Eliot answers himself and affirms that to lay the burden on the shoulders of Milton and Dryden was a mistake.<sup>96</sup> He reiterates:—

"If such a dissociation did take place, I suspect that the causes are too complex and too profound to justify our accounting for the change in terms of literary criticism."<sup>97</sup>

The foregoing review of Eliot's position in relation to Milton would indicate the direction of what Eliot's critics consider "a recantation of his earlier opinion" and what Eliot

91. O.P.P., p. 151.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

95. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose; The Metaphysical Poets*, p. 111.

96. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 153.

97. *Ibid.*

regards it as a sort of "development."<sup>98</sup> Irrespective of its genesis, nature or qualification, the revaluation has enhanced the stature of Milton and has added to the integrity of Eliot.

Agreeing with most of the criticism of Milton by Dr. Johnson in *The Lives*, Eliot sums up the final assessment of Milton in the following words:—

"I repeat that the remoteness of Milton's verse from ordinary speech, his invention of his own poetic language seems to me one of the marks of his greatness. Other marks are his sense of structure, both in the general design of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson*, and in his syntax; and finally, and not least, his inerrancy, conscious or unconscious, in writing so to make the best display of his talents, and the best concealment of his weakness."<sup>99</sup>

The passage may be noted for its objectivity and frankness. It registers one of the best and the most factual reconstructions of Milton's talents and his achievements. Now Eliot recommends to the poets without any reservation, to study Milton and refers to him, outside the theatre, as "the greatest master in our language of freedom within form."<sup>100</sup> In the context of discovering new and more elaborate patterns of a diction, already established, Eliot feels that poetry might learn much from Milton's extended verse structure. It might also avoid the danger of a servitude to colloquial speech and to current jargon. Milton can show, how to infuse the strongest music into poetry by the use of the appropriate words. Finally, Milton's example can inspire young poets to supplement knowledge of the literature of their own language, with knowledge of the literature and grammatical construction of other languages.<sup>101</sup> Then comes the final exhortation of Eliot, which says:—

"It now seems to me that poets are sufficiently liberated from Milton's reputation, to approach the study of his works without danger, and with profit to their poetry and to the English language."<sup>102</sup>

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98. *Ibid.*

99. O.P.P., p. 155.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

The case of Byron's rehabilitation is quite different from that of Milton. In the essay on Byron, Eliot explains the reasons for writing on the younger romantic.<sup>103</sup> He expresses his dissatisfaction on the fact that no interpretation for Byron's verse has yet been offered. He refers to his own article as an attempt in that direction "to start that ball rolling."<sup>104</sup> In Eliot's view, the bulk of Byron's poetry is distressing in proportion to its quality. Moreover, one would suppose that he never destroyed anything. Eliot does not see anything, worthy of the name of Byron, in most of his shorter poems; but he appreciates his longer poems and goes to the extent of saying that he did something that no one else has "ever equalled."<sup>105</sup>

Eliot criticises Byron for his defective sensibility and imperceptiveness to the English word. He alleges that Byron unlike any other English poet of his eminence, "added nothing to the language, discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning of individual words."<sup>106</sup> Referring to his intermittent philosophizing and its failure to leave any impact, Eliot affirms that it is not the weakness of the ideas but the schoolboy command of the language that makes his lines seem trite and his thought shallow.<sup>107</sup> But the greatest praise that Eliot bestows on Byron, is with regard to the last cantos of *Don Juan*. He places them at the head of Byron's works, for the simple reason, that the subject matter gave him at least an adequate object for a genuine emotion—the emotion for the hatred of hypocrisy.<sup>108</sup> He categorically declares that Byron's satire upon English society in the later part of *Don Juan* is something, for which, he could find no parallel in English literature.<sup>109</sup> In his last analysis, while commending Byron for his unusual frankness and a reckless raffish honesty, Eliot gives his own verdict:—

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103. O.P.P., p. 193.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

107. *Ibid.*

108. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

109. *Ibid.*

"I do not pretend that Byron is Villon (nor, for other reasons, does Dunbar or Burns equal the French poet), but I have come to find in him certain qualities, besides his abundance, that are too uncommon in English poetry as well as the absence of some vices that are too common."<sup>110</sup>

In his interpretation of culture Eliot has carried "the argument to an important new stage."<sup>111</sup> His position in this respect is essentially traditional and conservative. The whole discussion is regulated by his confession of a pre-determined attitude towards life and letters. In fact, the kind of analysis he undertakes in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, or *The Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, forms the gamut of Eliot's own reaction to contemporary society and to the cross-currents of its social philosophies. Nevertheless, it initiates a valuable dialogue on an oft-repeated subject—the importance of art to civilization. Taken together, the two books offer a sort of renewed definition of culture, conceived in the context of various problems, peculiar to an industrial and democratic society.

Eliot does not envisage a programmatic development of art and culture. In his opinion, they cannot flourish in isolation. The nature of the organisation of society directly influences the standards of art and culture. In a state of confusion, chaos and disintegration, no material and physical improvement is possible. He believes that in order to better the standards of art and culture, it is necessary that the socio-religious complex on which the organisation of society ought to be built, is strengthened. Art, to him, is the by-product of a genuinely healthy state of an organised society. Its falling standard is always a symptom of what Eliot qualifies as "some social ailment",<sup>112</sup> which requires a thorough investigation in case any substantial improvement in art and culture is sought for. He observes:—

"The steady influence which operates silently in any mass society organised for profit for the depression of standards of art and culture. The increasing organisation of advertisement and propaganda—or the influencing of masses of men

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110. O.P.P., p. 206.

111. Williams Raymond—*Culture and Society*, p. 224.

112. Eliot, T. S.—*The Idea of a Christian Society*, p. 39.

by any means except through the intelligence—is all against them. The economic system is against them, the chaos of ideals and confusion of thought in our large scale mass education is against them and against them also is the disappearance of any class of people who recognise public and private responsibility of patronage of the best that is made and written.”<sup>113</sup>

These observations are significantly valuable. They form part of Eliot’s basic approach which runs through the entire body of his literary effort. In all his important theories—of Tradition, Poetry and Impersonality—Eliot has stressed the organic character of art and literature. His concept of the diffusion of culture is primarily based on the same view. He voices his strong opposition to Mannheim’s theory of substituting *elite* for classes, for the simple reason that “it posits an atomic view of society.”<sup>114</sup> Eliot advances four arguments in objecting to the theory of an *elite* society: first, its common culture will be meagre; second, it will imply a change of persons in each generation; third, it will not ensure general continuity beyond the particular specialities of the *elite* itself; and finally, it will lack the much needed social cohesion which has always been guaranteed by a class.<sup>115</sup>

Eliot’s emphasis is different. He is a conservative and wants to retain the status-quo in society. He is not for an *elite* society but still favours governing social class with which he expects “the *elite* to overlap and interact.”<sup>116</sup> Eliot is against the specialisms of the *elite*, but within the whole content of culture, he is prepared to make allowance for the special skills, if any. He voices his strong opposition to the notions of classless society and the demands for a national educational system. In liberalism, he predicts only the dividends of disorder. “Industrialism”, he suggests, “would create not a society but a mob.”<sup>117</sup> Nor does he like the practice of defining social ends in terms of Democracy, which according to

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113. Eliot, T. S.—*The Idea of a Christian Society*, p. 39.

114. Eliot, T. S.—*Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 37.

115. *Ibid.*

116. Williams Raymond—*Culture and Society*, p. 237.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 226.



him, "means too many things to mean anything",<sup>118</sup> at all. As such, neither of them—Liberalism and Democracy—can provide to society the necessary avenues for regulating its whole way of life.

Eliot views culture as an organic whole. In his opinion, the sense of culture lies in the whole way of life rather than in any of its fragmented aspects, howsoever important they might be. He says:—

"Culture includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people; Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board wensledale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar."<sup>119</sup>

Any galaxy of "activities and interests" would be inextensive from Eliot's point of view. The list furnished by him categorises culture into the ways of sport, food, religion and a little of leisurely art. Another significant assertion, which Eliot makes regarding culture, is that left to itself, the Culture of a people does have its own categories or levels, which may vary from time to time. For instance, he clarifies:—

"You cannot expect to have all stages of development at once.....A civilization cannot simultaneously produce great folk poetry at one Cultural level and *Paradise Lost* at another."<sup>120</sup>

From various levels of culture, Eliot passes on to the discussion of different senses of culture. He differentiates in its three senses which may correspond to three types of development—"the development of an individual, of a group or class, or of a whole society."<sup>121</sup> Proceeding with his own analysis, Eliot makes an important suggestion:—

"A good deal of confusion could be avoided, if we refrained from setting before the group, what can be the aim only of the individual and before society as a whole, what can be the aim only of a group."<sup>122</sup>

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118. *Ibid.*

119. Eliot, T. S.—*Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 31.

120. *Ibid*, p. 25.

121. *Ibid*, p. 21.

122. *Ibid*, p. 22.

The suggestion furnishes a plausible ground to Eliot for building up his defence of social classes in society. His argument is, that in a healthy society, the maintenance of a particular level of culture is to the benefit, not merely of the class which maintains it, but also to the society as a whole.<sup>123</sup> He goes as far back as the primitive society to justify his theory of classes. Eliot's contention is that the higher types exhibit "more marked differentiations of functions"<sup>124</sup> amongst their members than the lower ones. In his view, it is only gradually that the classes tend to develop, out of the inherent condition, the idea that some functions are "more honoured than others."<sup>125</sup> And further more, a stage is brought where the honour and privilege is given to the person not merely as "functionary" but as "member of a class."<sup>126</sup> In this way, even the class acquires a functionary position and assumes to protect "that part of the total culture of the society"<sup>127</sup> which is so vital to its own existence. Hence, Eliot jumps to the final conclusion, that the awareness of such historical growth and necessity of the theory of classes would prevent us from supposing that the "culture of a higher class is something superfluous to society as a whole."<sup>128</sup>

Any one, seriously interested in anthropology and sociology, would find it difficult to subscribe in full to the above generalisation which Eliot has made in **The Notes towards the Definition of Culture**. Although, Eliot's emphasis on different levels of culture provides a useful hypothesis to the idea of the "community of Culture"; yet his stress on social classes is fraught with grave and practical misgivings. His analysis of the theory of classes, no less than his conclusions, suffer from the lack of a dispassionate outlook.

Historically speaking, the theory exposes itself to an utter disregard of the economic factor. Again, to equate class with

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123. Notes: p. 35.

124. *Ibid.*

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Ibid.*

127. *Ibid.*

128. *Ibid.*

function, as Eliot has done, is basically incorrect. It is obviously for three reasons. First, "a function has the tendency to turn into property." Second, it can be divorced from the property and as a result, its maintenance may become a new function itself, falsifying thus, the relevance of any consistent relationship between class and function.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, in the limited sense, all this may lead to an unequal social state where accumulation of wealth would become itself a function of the privileged few.

Eliot's concept of culture, when pursued to its logical reasoning, betrays a similar type of inconsistency. In his emphasis on Culture as "a way of life", Eliot has referred to two of its major components—conscious and unconscious. The large part of "a way of life", according to Eliot, is necessarily unconscious. In this sense, "a religion, moral code, a system of law, or a body of work in the arts", are just the conscious parts of culture. Its bulk comprises the unconscious part which is essentially vital for its distinctive and effective existence. But the classification Eliot has adopted, appears not only ambiguous but also irrelevant. We find that it is not possible to establish practical correspondence between "the conscious culture and the whole way of life."<sup>130</sup> The conscious culture when it assumes such proportion, as to become identical with the vested interests of a particular class, ceases to perform any positive function. Under these circumstances, it is always confusing to make distinction in, what we call the degree of conscious culture on the one hand and the degree of social privilege, on the other.

In our final discussion of Eliot's *The Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, we may say, that with all its glaring lapses of outlook and analysis, the contents therein have been very useful. In its totality, Eliot's attitude towards culture has certainly helped in furthering understanding in many directions. His theory of culture as "a whole way of life" reiterates the organic view of society. His criticism of the theory of elite has been really educative. His stress on different levels

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129. Williams Raymond—*Culture and Society*, p. 232.

130. *Culture and Society*, p. 233.

of culture is of no less practical value. Eliot's bold assertion against the democratic diffusion of culture has positively led to a sort of rethinking on the subject. His stand against liberalism and industrialism has been valuably significant. Finally, Eliot's strong disapproval of reducing "the transmission of culture to a system of formal education" may be considered an enlightening attempt in the process of simplifying an issue, which has been a subject of hard controversy, right from the beginning of the Industrial society to the present day.

But this should not be construed to imply that whatever Eliot has said about culture is all tenable. His emphasis on class as against elite is misleading. His advocacy of a consistent relationship between "class" and "function" as also between "conscious culture" and the "whole way of life" is *prima facie* evasive. Besides, Eliot insists on Culture as a whole way of life, but does not consider it feasible to assess the whole system as a whole. In theory, "his insistence is on wholeness; in practice he tends to become fragmentary."<sup>131</sup> He voices his opposition to the emergence of elites but recommends the retention of a "governing social class", with which he contends, "the elite would overlap and even interact."<sup>132</sup> It is worthwhile to quote Raymond William's valuable comment on Eliot's approach towards Culture:—

"If Eliot, when read attentively, has the effect of checking the complacencies of liberalism, he has also, when read critically, the effect of making complacent conservatism impossible."<sup>133</sup>

Ever since the publication of *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot may be said to have given serious thought to the possible revival of "Poetic Drama."<sup>134</sup> After Yeats, he is perhaps the only person who has endeavoured so hard for the rejuvenation of this craft. He has not only theorised on the art of poetic drama, but has also tried to transform the same into practice through the body of plays he has written. We should bear

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131. *Culture and Society*, p. 238.

132. *Ibid.*

133. *Ibid.*

134. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood: "The Possibility of Poetic Drama"*, p. 60.

in mind that the interplay between theory and practice which is well up to the mark in Eliot's poems is very weak in his plays. Mr. Matthiessen rightly observes:—

"Eliot's conception of drama, his belief in the need for poetic drama, still remain more in the realm of theory even in his own experiments, as well as in their limited effect on the general course of drama in our time."<sup>135</sup>

Even Eliot is conscious of the limitations of his own efforts when he acknowledges:—

"It is one thing to discuss the rules of an art when that art is alive and quite another when it is dead."<sup>136</sup>

He regards his own endeavours as only the preparatory stage in the revival of modern poetic drama:—

"The creation of any form cannot be the work of one man or of one generation of men working together, but has to evolve by the small contributions of a number of people in succession each contributing a little. Shakespeare himself did not invent suddenly."<sup>137</sup>

Hence, in Eliot's view, the creation of any form is not an ordinary pursuit of an isolated individual. It demands collective efforts of a number of persons belonging to successive generations.<sup>138</sup> He agrees that modern poetic drama is "still very experimental."<sup>139</sup> He expresses the hope that whatever has been achieved in this direction would serve as "foundations upon which others would come to build."<sup>140</sup> The verse drama interests Eliot for the obvious reason that it "provides an incentive towards further experiment and exploration."<sup>141</sup> He exhorts the coming writers to work in the selfless spirit of Yeats, who, he says, "cared more for the theatre as an organ

135. Matthiessen, F.O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 155.

136. Eliot, T. S.—*Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry*.

137. *The Need for Poetic Drama*; *The Listener*, Nov., 1936, p. 994.

138. *The Aims of Drama*, p. 7.

139. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 33.

140. *The Aims of Drama*, p. 7.

141. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 86.

for the consciousness of a people than as a means to his own fame or achievement."<sup>142</sup>

As early as 1923, Eliot holds the conception of poetic drama as an organic whole.<sup>143</sup> He comes to the realization that verse is not a mere decoration or trimming added to the play. The poetic drama is not prose drama with a top dressing of poetry.<sup>144</sup> On the other hand, the poetic pattern and the dramatic pattern must subsist together as "integral products of one act of imagination."<sup>145</sup> In genuine poetic drama, poetry and drama are organically interfused together. In fact, it is the theatre where "poetry must justify itself dramatically."<sup>146</sup> As Eliot explains it:—

"The writer of poetic drama is not merely a man skilled in two arts and skilful to weave them together; he is not a writer who can decorate a play with poetic language and metre. His task is different from that of the "dramatist" or that of the "Poet", for his pattern is more complex and dimensional. . . . The genuine poetic drama must at its best, observe all the regulations of the plain drama, but will weave them organically into a much richer design."<sup>147</sup>

According to Eliot, a great poetic drama is an extension of sensibility. It has the power to furnish vistas for exploring new horizons of thought and feeling. Eliot becomes deeply engrossed in the study of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama simply because it had demonstrated such potentialities. These dramatists could forge together all the elements required for the full flowering of the dramatic art. They expanded the range of fancy to its farthest extremes and wove it into the woof of complete verisimilitude. In the words of D. E. Jones, they were able to move smoothly from the one extreme to the other, in the same play "from the earthiness of the rude

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142. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 187.

143. *The Nation and Athenaeum*; as quoted by Matthiessen, p. 158.

144. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 7.

145. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 156.

146. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 72.

147. Eliot, T. S.—Introduction to G. Wilson Knight's—*The Wheel of Fire*, p. xix.

mechanicals to the ethereality of the fairies, from Caliban to Ariel."<sup>148</sup>

Eliot praises Shakespeare and other dramatists of the period. In his opinion, their plays are poetic, not because of touchstone passages of beautiful description or profound philosophy. The appeal of their poetry, on the other hand, lies in something else—the whole conception. With the disappearance of this conception, under the impact of science and industry and the break, which the closure of theatres, in 1642, brought in the tradition of poetic drama, the craft suffered a set back. The prose drama in the seventeenth century becomes divorced from human reality while poetic drama caters to the sheer bombast and heroic. As Eliot remarks:—

"To create a form is not merely to invent a shape, a rhyme or rhythm. It is also the realization of the whole appropriate content of this rhyme or rhythm. The sonnet of Shakespeare is not merely such and such a pattern, but a precise way of thinking and feeling."<sup>149</sup>

Eliot's stress on "a precise way of thinking and feeling", provides a key to the understanding of all his creative endeavours in poetry as well as in drama. Poetic drama, he concedes, is better suited for "presenting feeling by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world."<sup>150</sup> He argues that poetry alone is "the mode in which reality is experienced most profoundly."<sup>151</sup> It has the power to reproduce its various levels—sensuous, intellectual, psychological, social and spiritual—upon which the wheel of life moves forward. It is poetry which transforms the expression of drama into something more "complete and dramatic."<sup>152</sup> Therefore, Eliot contends:—

"It is in fact the privilege of dramatic poetry to be able to show us several planes of reality, at once."<sup>153</sup>

He goes on:—

"Everybody knows that there are things that can be said in

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148. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 3.

149. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 63.

150. *Ibid*, p. 65.

151. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 153.

152. Ronald Peacock—*The Art of Drama*, p. 225.

153. The Aims of Poetic Drama—Adam C. F. Jones: *The Plays of Eliot*, p. 15.

music that cannot be said in speech. And there are things which can be said in poetic drama that cannot be said in either music or ordinary speech."<sup>154</sup>

The assertion is significant. It incorporates a new element into the framework of poetic drama. Eliot's conception of a verse play involves a "musical pattern."<sup>155</sup> A playwright in verse, according to Eliot, "must work like a musician as well as like a prose dramatist."<sup>156</sup>

He does not agree with the general view expressed in literary circles that the failure of dramatists in the nineteenth century or earlier, was due to lack of their theatrical experience. He, however, gives his own verdict:—

"It is not primarily lack of plot, or lack of action and suspense, or imperfect realization of character or lack of anything of what is called "theatre", that makes these plays so lifeless: it is primarily that their rhythm of speech is something that we cannot associate with any human being except a poetry reciter."<sup>157</sup>

He expresses the same view about modern drama:—

"It is the rhythm so utterly absent from modern drama, either verse or prose and which interpreters of Shakespeare do their best to suppress."<sup>158</sup>

He concludes:—

"The ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social usefulness for poetry is the theatre."<sup>159</sup>

He continues:—

"For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm and for auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning which reveals itself gradually.... sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements at once, though in different degrees of consciousness."<sup>160</sup>

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154. *The Listener*, p. 994, Cit. by Jones, *The Plays of Eliot*, p. 14.

155. *Ibid.*

156. *Ibid.*

157. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 31.

158. *The Nation and Athenaeum* (quoted) Mathiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 156.

159. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 153.

160. *Ibid.*



As in poetry so in drama, Eliot's first efforts were directed at revitalizing the rhythms and idioms of dramatic verse. By the end of the twenties, he had succeeded in performing the feat for the non-dramatic poetry. He was able to discover, create and develop a form of poetry, best suited to his own needs. But the theatre posed quite different problems. In the first instance, modern drama had lost the tradition in poetry. Secondly, the element of self-consciousness about dramatic poetry was lacking. Thirdly, naturalistic prose was the dominant theatrical medium. Fourthly, the loss of artistic conventions had persistently developed certain prejudices against dramatic poetry and its conscious enjoyment.<sup>161</sup> Fifthly, to the extent that the nineteenth century confined poetry to the closet, it also, in Eliot's view, impoverished drama.<sup>162</sup> Lastly, the lack of moral and social conventions also stood in the way of the poetic drama. In the absence of some common and well defined standards to measure what Jones refers to as "the significance of man's actions", it was but natural for poetic drama to face oblivion.

Eliot's efforts to revive poetic drama are marked, from the beginning, by full awareness of all these problems. He starts from one of his strongest convictions, that a verse form widely current in the past, even if renewed, cannot cater to the needs of the present. He expresses his genuine doubts if the Spensarian stanza, the Popean couplet or the Don Juan form of verse can serve any useful purpose. He has no hesitation in acknowledging the fact that blank verse for drama would be anything more than a poor imitation of Shakespeare. Eliot observes:—

"The problem for us, therefore, is to get away from Shakespeare.... That is not so easy. I have found in trying to write dramatic verse, that however different a metre from blank verse I was working with, whenever my attention was relaxed, or I have gone sleepy or stupid, I will wake up to find that I have been writing bad Shakespearean blank verse; and I had to scrap the lot and start all over again."<sup>163</sup>

161. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 21.

162. Matthiessen, F. O.—*Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 157.

163. Eliot, T. S.—Radio talk quoted by Matthiessen: *Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 158.

He concludes:—

"Hence, we have to make use of suggestions from remote drama, too remote for there to be any danger of imitation such as Everyman and the late medieval morality and mystery plays and the great Greek dramatists."<sup>164</sup>

Long before, he modelled his *Sweeney Agonistes*, Eliot was convinced of the necessity of devising a new form out of the colloquial speech.<sup>165</sup> He had also expressed similar views in *The Sacred Wood*:—

"The Elizabethan drama was aimed at a public which wanted *entertainment* of a crude sort but would stand a good deal of poetry; our problem should be to take a form of entertainment and subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art. Perhaps the music hall comedian is the best material."<sup>167</sup>

*Sweeney Agonistes* may be said to have initiated that "process." Eliot sub-titles its scenes as "fragments of an Aristophanic melodrama", but the source of conversational verse is much nearer at hand. The play stands out as the most important experiment in the development of Eliot's dramatic art. The reasons are obvious. First, it introduces colloquial rhythms and diction into poetic drama. Second, it deals with an aspect of the contemporary world. Third, it parodies the popular song of the Jazz era.<sup>167</sup> Fourth, Eliot shows by implication, that any hope for the revival of poetic drama is associated much more with the "robust entertainment" of the lower class than with that of the morally corrupt middle class which has been badly affected by the lifeless mechanisms of standardized cinema.<sup>168</sup>

Looking back at the efforts which Eliot has consistently made in reviving the art of drama, one may safely say that the promise of *Sweeney Agonistes* has been more than fulfilled. Besides, in between "Sweeney" and "Ash Wednesday" there has taken place a radical change. He has not lost his fondness for music hall as a dramatic medium. But the content

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164. Matthiessen—*Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 158.

165. Eliot, T. S.—*Introduction to Savonarola*.

166. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 70.

167. Jones, D. I.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 28.

168. Matthiessen & F. O.—*Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 158.

of his plays irrespective of the medium, has become altogether different.<sup>169</sup>

The changing pattern of Eliot's dramatic themes is important. Considered as a literary problem, it may not sound logical. But the problem of reviving poetic drama is not purely literary. It is something more; and that perhaps, none can better understand than Eliot himself. He had rightly perceived that the revival of this dead art would involve the necessary pre-condition of the "wholeness of outlook"—an outlook which could comprehend and comprise all aspects of human life. It is the ever growing consciousness of this wholeness of outlook which marks all his dramatic and non-dramatic poetry since *Ash Wednesday*. The shift is not sudden. It is born out of a consistent point of view. As Eliot explains:—

"For it is ultimately the function of art imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther."<sup>170</sup>

Eliot's later poetry and his plays exhibit, to an ample degree, his efforts towards the formulation of "a credible order" which he deems so necessary for the purpose of art. How far has he been able through his plays to achieve this ideal is a question, yet too early to answer.

Criticism in the last phase of his literary career is important in many respects. His rehabilitation of Milton has greatly added to his prestige as a critic. His essays on "*Drama and Poetry*"; "*Three Voices of Poetry*"; "*The Music of Poetry*"; and "*Johnson as a Critic and Poet*", taken together, would still place him by the side of the greatest of the literary critics. "*To Criticise the Critic*", is an honest attempt of the critic in Eliot to analyse his own art in the perspective of his literary career, spread-over to more than four decades. In the realm of social criticism also, the last phase is no less significant. The

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169. Brown E. Martin—*Eliot, The Man and His Works*, (ed.) Allen Tate, p. 118.

170. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 87.

**Idea of a Christian Society; The Notes towards the Definition of Culture; The Social Function of Poetry; and Virgil and the Christian World** are illuminating essays. His observations on contemporary society and even more, his concern for the future of society, especially in relation to religion and culture, may be considered of great value to the modern concept of society and anthropology. John Hayward rightly remarks:—

“There is perhaps inevitably, an element of didacticism in his later essays and addresses, which is not wholly disguised, though it is mitigated by Mr. Eliot’s characteristic method of exposition, by cautious stages of definition, doubt, reservation and qualification to the final affirmation.”<sup>171</sup>

**The Idea of a Christian Society**—an essay which generated much heat and controversy—does not formulate a definite programme or plan. It distinguishes rather a Christian idea of society from other ideas “with which it has become entangled.”<sup>172</sup> The book is revealing in as far as it provides some positive basis to the understanding of Eliot’s enthusiastic bias of Christian Humanism. As he declares:—

“A Christian education would primarily train people to be able to think in Christian categories.”<sup>173</sup>

This is, what his later poetry in general and plays in particular, have been “unobtrusively doing.”<sup>174</sup>

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171. Hayward John—*Selected Prose*, p. 12, Introduction.

172. Williams Raymond—*Culture and Society*, p. 226.

173. Eliot, T. S.—*The Idea of a Christian Society*, p. 28.

174. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, pp. 214-15.

## CHAPTER VI

### ELIOT AND OTHER CRITICS

Let me confess, that I feel myself diminished at the very idea of making a comparative study of Eliot and his contemporary critics. The subject, difficult as it is, seems no less embarrassing. It reminds me of an important dictum that to see his *maestro*, Dante had to "lift his eyelids a little higher."<sup>1</sup> Surely, the dictum states a significant principle but does not solve the problem. It will sound too arrogant to look up to Eliot and his contemporaries to claim scholarship. Yet, through these pages, a humble attempt has been made to determine the comparative nature of Eliot's literary criticism, in relation to that of Richards, Leavis and other critics of the Formalistic School.

We would like to initiate our discussion with some of the moving tributes which some of the contemporary writers have paid to Eliot after his death. **Ezra Pound**, his guide, friend, and philosopher recommends:—

"Let him rest in peace. I can only repeat, but with the urgency of fifty years ago: READ HIM."<sup>2</sup>

**John Crowe Ransom** has expressed similar feelings:—

"We must re-read him, and think a long time about his achievement, and about how the parts cumulated into a whole; thinking as precisely as we could possibly think about something intangible, in order to say what he had meant to English letters. His writings had already been committed to the public domain, but suddenly we had become the executors who must appraise the state."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Tate Allen—*Post Script: Eliot: The Man and His Work*, p. 389.

2. Tate Allen (ed.)—*Eliot: The Man and His Work*, p. 89.

3. Eliot—*The Man and His Mission*, p. 133.

**Bonamy Dobree** strikes a personal note of affection:—

“By his being he commanded respect; by his response to one’s own being he nurtured the profoundest and most lasting affection.”<sup>4</sup>

**Allen Tate** eulogises with a sort of spiritual candour:—

“One dies everyday one’s own death; but one cannot imagine the death of the man who was *il maestro di color che sanno*.”<sup>5</sup>

**Cleanth Brooks** highlights the literary aspect:—

“Few literary men in our history have so consistently related all their activities to a coherent set of principles. And the consistency of his various writings reflects the quality of the man. In a time of disorder, Eliot moved toward a restoration of order—toward the restoration of the order that poetry alone, perhaps can give.”<sup>6</sup>

**C. Day Lewis** invokes the Muse of poetry:—

.....“Now, supplying  
Our loss with words of comfort, his kind ghost  
Says all that need be said about committedness  
Here in East Coker they have crossed  
My heart again—*For us there is only the trying  
To learn to use words. The rest is not our business.*”<sup>7</sup>

**Sir Herbert Read** introduces a religious strain:—

“I do not presume to judge Eliot; I even tremble as I attempt to reveal some of the dimensions of his agony. But if in this context, I am to give any first allegiance to poetry (and I do not for a moment question the allegiance that a Christian poet must give to one whom Kierkegaard called “the unique person”) it is not harsh to pretend that the poet can have any other life or kingdom but poetry.”<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps, **I. A. Richards’** tribute is by far the most factual:—

“In talking of a writer we have known—and to those to whom he has mattered—how can we speak without feeling that he himself is by far the most important of the audience? As

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4. Tate Allen (ed.)—*Eliot: The Man and His Work*, p. 88.

5. *Ibid*, p. 389.

6. *Ibid*, p. 316.

7. *Ibid*, p. 115.

8. *Ibid*, p. 37.

indeed he is, not in any supernatural or transcendent sense, but as represented here, now, in minds which are in a measure what they are through him, so that in their judgment and reflection he is alive. Of no one is this more true than *TSE*. In one degree or another we are all products of his work."<sup>9</sup>

In the context of these warm feelings<sup>1</sup>, expressed by some of his closest associates, it appears desirable to point out that these tributes should not be taken as the expression of complete agreement with Eliot. In his essay on Yeats, Eliot himself has sounded a note of caution that "to be able to praise, it is not necessary to feel complete agreement."<sup>10</sup> But these expressions are certainly the token of this much of acknowledgment that Eliot and his work has a far greater relevance. His literary career is such that cannot be assessed in isolation. Any attempt to separate him from the wider literary or historical perspective is fraught with serious errors.

Looking back at the contemporary scene of literary criticism in the beginning of the Twenties, we experience the emergence of two major critics: T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards. It is wrong to presume that either of them pioneered any school of criticism of which the other one is also a member. Although, both of them have lent their support in the development of what we know today as the New Criticism; yet each has maintained his own reservations on the subject.<sup>11</sup> Eliot has many times criticised I. A. Richards and his literary theories; while Richards also has more than once voiced his differences with T. S. Eliot.<sup>12</sup> The two critics, who have been jointly and severally responsible for directing literary criticism into new channels, right from the beginning of the twenties, hold identical as well as dissenting views on various aspects of English literary criticism.

It is not easy to summarize precisely their actual positions. Broadly speaking, the critical methods of Eliot and Richards may appear to be similar. To both of them, the critical process is the same: analysis, interpretation and evalua-

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9. Richards, I. A.—*On T. S. E.: Eliot: The Man and His Work*, p. 1.

10. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 262.

11. Eliot, T. S.—*U.P.U.C.*, p. 149.

12. Richards, I. A.—*The Principles of Literary Criticism*.

tion. But, a close study of the details involved in the process, would show that there is much dissimilarity in the nature and scope of their respective methods. Apparently, we notice four differences. First, Richards being an adept analyst, brings out a more elaborate and comprehensive technique of verbal analysis. Second, being a teacher, he shows greater skill in the matter of interpretation. Third, Richards with his wider knowledge of science and technology, has given a scientific complexion to his verbal technique. Lastly, he has been able to provide to his technique a theoretical base, developed from his deep study and understanding of psychology. Eliot, on the other hand, is an analyst in the general sense. His interest and knowledge in psychology is not so profound. Moreover, he does not subscribe to Richards' theory of Value and Communication. Eliot's own observations, in this respect, are significant:—

"Mr. Richards, like every serious critic of poetry, is a serious moralist as well. His ethics or theory of value, is one which I cannot accept; or rather, I cannot accept any such theory which is erected upon purely individual-psychological foundations."<sup>13</sup>

He explains the reasons of his disapproval:—

"But his psychology of the poetic experience is based upon his own experience of poetry as truly as his theory of value arises out of his psychology."<sup>14</sup>

Eliot commends Richards' "discriminating taste in poetry", but warns:—

"If on the other hand, you had no faith in the critic's ability to tell a good poem from a bad one, you would put little reliance upon the validity of his theories."<sup>15</sup>

Again, in the essay **The Modern Mind**, he pays a left-handed compliment to Richards' criticism:—

"Even if his criticism proves to be entirely on the wrong track, even if his modern 'self-consciousness' turns out to be only a blind alley, Mr. Richards will have done something in accelerating the exhaustion of the possibilities. He will have help-

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13. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., Introduction, p. 17.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*



ed indirectly to discredit the criticism of persons qualified neither by sensibility nor by knowledge of poetry from which we suffer daily."<sup>16</sup>

Eliot's disapproval of Richards' criticism is based on his own reaction against what he calls the "lemon squeezer school of criticism."<sup>17</sup> In fact, he directs his attack on the class-room-method of Richards' criticism, which the latter has propounded in his **Practical Criticism**.<sup>18</sup> Reacting indirectly to this technique, which he qualifies as the theory of Education, Eliot observes:—

"The method is to take a well known poem, without reference to the author or to his other works, analyse it stanza by stanza and line by line, and extract, squeeze, tease, press every drop of meaning out of it that one can."<sup>19</sup>

The method "exhibits sincerity and singlemindedness",<sup>20</sup> but Eliot foresees three dangers. First, it may make us think that the poem has only one meaning.<sup>21</sup> Second, it may give rise to the legitimate speculation that this meaning is what the poet meant to mean. Third, such type of teasing and pressing the stanzas beyond their reasonable limits, may cause the poem to disintegrate in the mind of the readers.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from these objections, which Eliot enlists against the method of class-room criticism of Richards, there are basic differences between the two critics on the problem of Value. Eliot's understanding of value is generally structural. He is asserting again and again close "interaction between prose and verse."<sup>23</sup> He affirms that in the writing of poetry, there is a great deal, which requires "conscious and deliberate"<sup>24</sup> efforts. He is always stressing the need of a suitable form, which

16. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 123.

17. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poets and Poetry*, p. 118.

18. Richards, I. A.—*Practical Criticism*.

19. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 118.

20. Lucy Sean—*Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 43.

21. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P., p. 118.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 152.

24. Eliot, T. S.—*Tradition and Individual Talent, Selected Prose*, p. 29.

possesses "a precise way of thinking and feeling"<sup>25</sup>—the way the sonnet of Shakespeare showed that capacity. In short, Eliot stands for a well-knit "organisation"<sup>26</sup> of all the parts of a poem, fused together within the pattern of its structural unity—the sort of unity which Eliot was able to achieve in **Four Quartets**. Richards' concept of value is altogether different. It is not merely structural: it is mainly psychological. His concern is not so much with the poem itself, as it is with the reaction it brings in the mind of the reader. Pursued to its logical conclusion, the divergence in the two emphases assumes basic difference in the whole body of their literary criticism. Eliot foresees value in the poem itself while Richards explores it in the mind of the reader or the listener. This shift, from the object of art to the mind of its appreciator, plays a vital part in the whole theory and practice of Richards' literary criticism.

It has been pointed out that Richards' theory of Value is only a restatement of Aristotle's theory of Katharsis. In fact, the influence of Aristotle, Bentham, and Coleridge is clearly discernible in the poetics of Prof. Richards. For the purpose of a better understanding of Richards' view of Value, it is necessary to follow some of its meaningful features. We come across the first glimpses of his theory of Value in the **Foundations of Aesthetics**—a book which Richards wrote in collaboration with C. K. Ogden and James Wood. Later on, in the **Principles of Literary Criticism**; and **Science and Poetry**, Richards further develops the same concept. The **Aesthetics** provides a new definition of "Beauty" as "anything that excites emotions."<sup>27</sup> The book refers to the beautiful; and suggests a peaceful and pleasurable state of mind called **synaesthesia**. Richards explains that it is a state of "harmony and equilibrium for our impulses."<sup>28</sup> He contends that all impulses are not "naturally harmonious",<sup>29</sup> but a proper organisation of some

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25. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 63.

26. Eliot, T. S.—*U.P.U.C.*, p. 146.

27. Richards, I. A.—*Foundation of Aesthetics*, pp. 123-24.

28. Wimsatt and Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism*, p. 615.

29. *Aesthetics*, p. 75.

of them can bring us harmony.<sup>30</sup> It must be noted again that the organisation, as conceived by Richards in the fusion of these impulses, is quite different from that as suggested by Eliot.<sup>31</sup> Eliot's stress is on organisation in relation to the various parts of a poem; while Richards is talking of organising the impulses that are latent in the mind of a poet. In Richards' view, even the conflicting impulses must have their "free interplay"<sup>32</sup> in the process of producing a beautiful work.

But the most comprehensive statement on the Theory of Value is to be found in the **Principles of Literary Criticism.**<sup>33</sup> Richards observes that impulses often act in an imperceptible manner. They are sometimes not compatible to what he calls appetancies. It means that their organisation or systematization involves a large number of combinations and permutations, thus making organisation a subject for planned and conscious arrangement. But Richards warns:—

"To guard against a possible misunderstanding it may be added that the organisation and systematisation of which I have been speaking in this Chapter are not primarily an affair of conscious planning or arrangements, as this is understood, for example, by a great business house or by a railway."<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, Richards' position may be stated as: first, the synaesthesia "refreshes and never exhausts"<sup>35</sup>; second, the impulses may be organised by synthesis or by elimination but only the poetry emerging out of the former organisation or what he calls the poetry of "Inclusion" can be the greatest; third, the presence of irony may act as a sort of touch-stone in judging its greatness. He even declares that "fine irony is ever present in the best poetry."<sup>36</sup>

John Crowe Ransom does not agree with the conclusions of Prof. Richards. He has questioned the validity of the

30. Wimsatt and Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism*, p. 616.

31. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 146.

32. *Aesthetics*, p. 75.

33. Richards, I. A.—*Principles*, p. 44.

34. Richards, I. A.—*Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 57.

35. Richards, I. A.—*Aesthetics*, p. 77.

36. *Ibid.*

touch-stone of irony:—

“My belief is that opposites can never be said to be resolved or reconciled merely because they have been got into the same poem or got into the same complex of affective experience to create there a kind of tension.”<sup>37</sup>

Irony, according to Ransom, cannot be a “constant characteristic”<sup>38</sup> of good poetry. It only suggests failure to unify. He has equally criticised Eliot’s notion of a poem as a “fusion of thought and feeling.”<sup>39</sup> “Both the critics”, Ransom asserts, “attempt to reconcile”, what he considers “irreconcilables.”<sup>40</sup> His contention is that “ironic poetry can represent only irresolution: that is, the oppositions produce an indecisive effect.”<sup>41</sup> Ransom’s attack on Richards is directed against contradictory elements in his theory and practice. First, that the poem is “susceptible to analysis.”<sup>42</sup> Second, the psychological goings-on turn out to be “below the surface and out of sight.”<sup>43</sup> Hence, Ransom concludes, that if the “poise” of the poem consists as Richards feels, it does in only the “response” of the readers as against relevant structure of the poem itself, then it becomes all the more useless to carry on its analysis in any form whatsoever.<sup>44</sup>

It is not easy to agree to all the observations of Ransom. The way he has questioned the propriety of the use of irony, does not sound as fully justified. Eliot’s own position in this particular respect is somewhat analogous to that of Richards. He believes, that in poetry “heterogeneous ideas”<sup>45</sup> can be yoked together. He praises Marvell for what he calls “making of the familiar strange and the strange familiar.”<sup>46</sup> He com-

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37. Ransom, J. Crowe—*The New Criticism*, p. 95.

38. Richards, I. A.—*Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 250.

39. Ransom, J. Crowe—*The New Criticism*, p. 183.

40. Wimsatt & Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism* (Quoted), p. 621.

41. *Ibid*, p. 622.

42. *Ibid*, p. 620.

43. *Ibid*.

44. *Ibid*.

45. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Essays*, p. 243.

46. *Ibid*, p. 258.

mends the metaphysical poets for "amalgamating disparate experiences."<sup>47</sup> His argument that witty poetry is embodied "in the expression of every experience",<sup>48</sup> indirectly supports the view that wit calls for the fusion of the "potentially discordant"<sup>49</sup> elements—the elements which are necessarily present in a good poem. To quote some of the examples, the poetry, of Elizabethan dramatists in the 16th century; of Dante in the 13th; of Metaphysical poets in the 17th; and of Jules Laforgue and other symbolists in the present era, can be brought under this category, where disparate and discordant elements are effectively fused together.

In one more respect, Eliot shares his views with Richards. His theory of Poetry is equivalent to some version of latter's psychologistic theory<sup>50</sup> Both of them agree that ordinary and artistic experiences are different. Moreover, an artistic experience comprehends greater complexity and inheres a wider scope. As to the sources of the poetic experience, both the critics have something common to suggest. For example, Eliot differentiates between the two experiences.—

"The latter (ordinary man) falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the type writer or the smell of the cooking, in the mind of the poet the experiences are always forming new wholes."<sup>51</sup>

We quote a similar passage from Richards.—

'The wheeling of the pigeons in Trafalgar Square may seem to have no relation to the colour of the water in the basins to the tones of a speaker's voice or to the drift of his remarks. A narrow field of stimulation is all that we can manage and we overlook the rest. But the artist does not, and when he needs it, he has it at his disposal.'<sup>52</sup>

The two passages quoted above do not require further comment. They show, that in certain areas, Eliot and Richards

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47. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Essays*, p. 247.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

49. Wimsatt & Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism*, p. 621.

50. Ransom, J. Crowe—*The New Criticism*.

51. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Essays*, p. 247.

52. Richards, I. A.—*Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 185.

share each other's views. Nevertheless, the differences in them are basic. In this respect, let us bear in mind two important points: first, Richards has little to say on the phenomenon of poetic creation, second, he, from the very beginning, has endeavoured to maintain a careful distinction between the "emotional state produced in the reader (the state of synaesthetics) and the means used to produce this emotional state."<sup>55</sup> Eliot, on the other hand, has his own theory of the "poetic process"<sup>56</sup> and has always maintained that a "poem is a fusion of thought and feeling"<sup>55</sup>

On the question, whether art is expression or communication, Richards' stand is clear. He holds the view that communication is an integral part of poetry. He argues that "a great part of our experience takes the form it does, because we are social beings and accustomed to communication from infancy."<sup>56</sup> He goes as far as to suggest that all "supremely successful communication" involves a close and natural correspondence between what he calls "the poet's impulses and the possible impulses in his reader."<sup>57</sup> According to him, such a psychological correspondence becomes operative through the medium of language. He also forewarns against any "deliberate or conscious attempt to communication", because such an attempt is not going to be as "successful as the unconscious indirect method."<sup>58</sup>

Eliot's approach in this respect is different from that of Richards. He is not prepared to subscribe to the view that poetry is mere communication. "Communication", he says, "will not explain poetry."<sup>59</sup> He also appears to disagree with Richards' definition of a poem as "an artist's experience."<sup>60</sup> Eliot argues:—

53 Wimsatt & Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism*, p 623

54. Eliot, T S—*The Sacred Wood*, p 53

55 Eliot, T S—*The Selected Prose*, p 112

56 Richards, I A—*Principles*, p 25

57 *Ibid*, p 29

58 *Ibid*

59 Eliot, T S—U P U C, p 138.

60. Richards, I A—*Principles*, p 226.

'If poetry is a form of "communication", yet that which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it'<sup>61</sup>

He, however, agrees with Richards on two counts: first, that a poet wishes "to give pleasure to entertain or divert people",<sup>62</sup> and second, that any sort of planned or conscious attempt to design the communication is not to prove fruitful." David Daiches' observations on the early phase of Richards' critical career are significant.—

"Richards' concern in his early phase of his critical career was to demonstrate the value of poetry by showing, how it arose from and communicated a state of psychological health, a finely balanced organisation of the nervous system which was a basic human problem."<sup>63</sup>

Naturally, if the poem is meaningful in communicating the "poet's valuable inner organisation",<sup>64</sup> as in Richards' view it is, then an investigation into the way it communicates, becomes necessary. It is with this view, that he takes up the study of semantics and considers the problem of meaning, language and its use in minute details. **The Meaning of Meaning**; the **Principles of Literary Criticism**; the **Philosophy of Rhetoric**; and **Practical Criticism** contain the various facets of the semantic principle, which Richards has elaborated. It is not possible here to discuss in detail the implications of this concept. But the whole case, which Richards has presented, may be studied in some of its broader outlines.

In the first instance, Richards makes out a point for the "symbolic or the referential"<sup>65</sup> use of language. Second, he differentiates between its "scientific and emotive"<sup>66</sup> values. Third, in determining what Richards calls the "meaning of meaning", he develops the psychological and contextual theory

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61 Eliot, T S—UPUC, p 30 .

62 *Ibid*

63 *Ibid*.

64. Daiches David—*The Present Age*, p 132

65 *Ibid*, p. 132

66 Richards, I A—*The Meaning of Meaning*, preface.

67. Richards, I A—*Principles*, p 261

of meaning<sup>68</sup> The theory suggests that the words are symbols which signify their "full, proper and requisite meaning in that particular context"<sup>69</sup> Fourth, rhythm and meaning are inseparably related "Poetic rhythm," says Richards, "influences and is influenced by meaning"<sup>70</sup> Fifth, he feels that metaphor is not merely "a grace or ornament or added power of language" it is its constitutive form"<sup>71</sup> Lastly, the semantic analysis such as that advocated by Richards appears to imply "value in complexity"<sup>72</sup> The semantic criticism lays stress on the organic structure of the parts of a poem wherein they happen to be so closely fused together as to make the totality of meaning possible, not on one level, but on various levels of the poem.

Barring Richards' classification of the language into scientific or emotive uses, Eliot's own practice in more than one sense, is not different from that of Richards. He, like Richards, supports the view that words have great power;<sup>73</sup> that rhythm and meaning are inseparable,<sup>74</sup> and that their "contextual background"<sup>75</sup> is no less important. Like any other semanticist, Eliot has closely stood by the "organic whole of the poem"<sup>76</sup> In fact, it is Eliot, who has emphasized, more than any one else, on the "musicality of words in their colloquial setting"<sup>77</sup> The sense of rhythm, according to him, is an indispensable part of the sense of structure.<sup>78</sup> As a rule, in the metaphorical and the ironic uses of language, Eliot's position is similar to that of Richards. But in its operative part, what Eliot wants the metaphor or irony to serve, is differ-

68 Richards, I A—*The Meaning of Meaning*.

69 *Ibid*

70 Richards, I A—*Practical Criticism*, p 229

71 Richards, I A—*Philosophy of Rhetoric*

72 Wimsatt & Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism*, p 652

73 Eliot, T S—*The Music of Poetry*, O P P, p 26

74 *Ibid*

75 Eliot, T S—"Auditory Imagination", U P U C, p 118.

76 Eliot, T. S—*The Music of Poetry*, O P P, p 26

77. *Ibid*

78 *Ibid*



ent from that what Richards wants them to constitute.<sup>79</sup> These, in Eliotian concept, are all aspects of dramatic presentation as distinguished from the "personal expression"<sup>80</sup> of the poet. It appears feasible to point out the significant shift in the earlier position of I. A. Richards. In the early phases of his critical career, Richards had begun with the thesis, that words were "arbitrary signs."<sup>81</sup> But gradually, like Eliot, he arrives at the concept of a better organic impact of words.<sup>82</sup> In this respect, the observations of Wimsatt and Brooks are significant —

"Even a theorist like I. A. Richards, who began with the thesis that words were arbitrary signs, in the course of time proceeded toward a correction and modification of that thesis and in doing so came to argue for much more organic conception of words, finally arriving at the view that reality itself, as man can know it, is a symbolic construction 'the fabric of our meanings, which is the word', is Richards' way of putting it in 1936."<sup>83</sup>

Apart from their literary significance, Richards' theories of Value, Communication, and Language have added new dimensions to some of the important issues, which the contemporary society is facing at present. Through these theories, both Richards and Eliot have been able to focus attention on such subjects as the relationship between "poetry and belief"; the contemporary "state of culture"; and the "social uses" which art, literature, and language can be put to. In this way, Eliot and Richards concentrate on directing their attack on the aesthetic notions of the Romantics. By the 1920s, there is an orthodox tendency of considering the "aesthetic experience in isolation",<sup>84</sup> which was vigorously attacked by the two critics. Eliot's attack is directed through his "re-emphasis on tradition and faith";<sup>85</sup> while Richards spearheads

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79 Richards, I. A.—*Philosophy of Rhetoric*.

80 Wimsatt & Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism*, p. 675.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 586.

82 Richards, I. A.—*Practical Criticism*, p. 232.

83. Wimsatt & Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism*, p. 584.

84 Williams Raymond—*Culture and Society*, p. 239.

85 *Culture and Society*, p. 239.

it from a different angle—the “social facts of language and communication.”<sup>86</sup> He observes:—

“We pass, as a rule from a chaotic to a better organised state by ways which we know nothing about Typically through the influence of other minds Literature and the arts are the chief means by which their influences are diffused”<sup>87</sup>

Pointing out the social use of the Psychological Theory of Value, Richards reaffirms its claim to regulate life and its standards:—

“The conduct of life, is throughout an attempt to organise impulses so that success is obtained for the greater number or mass of them, for the most important and the weightiest set”<sup>88</sup>

Richards feels that the “thwarting of impulses”<sup>89</sup> in the individual as also in society leads to social disturbance and disorganisation. Hence, the problem of conduct is the problem of getting these impulses, adjusted and organised in a normal way. Value in this context assumes the role of order. What is psychologically effective in the case of an individual, becomes equally effective in relation to community and society. Thus, tensions—individual or social—if removed through the possible organisation of the impulses, would yield fruit and bring about a sort of sublimation in the entire conduct of life. The importance of art and literature lies in the fact that they offer convincing examples of such organisation. Therefore, Richards concludes that poetry is a “perfectly possible means of over-coming chaos.”<sup>90</sup> He makes one of the oft-debated declarations:—

“If this should happen a mental chaos such as man has never experienced may be expected We shall be thrown back, as Matthew Arnold foresaw, upon poetry Poetry, is capable of saving us”<sup>91</sup>

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86 *Culture and Society*, p 239

87 Richards, I A.—*Principles*, p 57

88 *Ibid.*, p. 46

89 *Ibid.*, p 51.

90 Richards, I A.—*Science and Poetry*, pp. 82-83

91 *Ibid*

Eliot strongly objects to this kind of Richards' assertion.<sup>92</sup> He resents "the intense religious seriousness of such an attitude towards poetry"<sup>93</sup> "What he proposes", Eliot affirms, "is nothing less than a regimen of spiritual exercises."<sup>94</sup> He continues —

"I only assert again that what he (Richards) is trying to do is essentially the same as what Arnold wanted to do to preserve emotions without the beliefs with which their history has been involved. It would seem that Mr. Richards, on his own showing is engaged in a rearguard religious action."<sup>95</sup>

In criticising Richards' statement: "Poetry is capable of saving us", Eliot, in fact, is criticising its "emotive vagueness"; its "blindness" to some of the relevant facts of modern life; and its suggestiveness of a religious terminology."<sup>96</sup> He is against the very notion of conceding to poetry any status, equivalent to that of a spiritual "Saviour."<sup>97</sup>

In closing our comparative analysis of Eliot and Richards, we may simply suggest that both of them have exercised considerable influence in their respective spheres. The former is the most influential of the "descriptive critics,"<sup>98</sup> and the latter is an "influential theorist"<sup>99</sup> of the century. Richards' criticism is affective rather than genitive. He has tried to interpret the value of literature in terms of its "after-effects"<sup>100</sup> on the reader's mind. It is but for him that semantics has become an "increasingly important aspect of modern criticism."<sup>101</sup> If Eliot, by his re-emphasis on Tradition, Impersonality and Order, comes very near to the classicists then Richards through his deep interest in psychology and syn-

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92 Eliot, T. S.—U P U C, p. 132

93 *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*

95 *Ibid.*, p. 135

96 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 30

97 Eliot, T. S.—U P U C

98. Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 196

99 *Ibid.*

100 Wimsatt & Brooks—*History of Literary Criticism*.

101 Daiches David—*The Present Age*, p. 133

aesthesis appears closer to the Romanticists. But irrespective of any such rigidity in their positions, the New Criticism owes much to their endeavours. It is through them that the literary criticism of today has acquired a scientific and psycho-analytical basis.

After I. A. Richards, the other major critic and contemporary of T. S. Eliot, is Dr. F. R. Leavis. His career as a critic may be said to have begun with the publication of the "Scrutiny", in 1932. Watson calls him the most influential British-born critic of the century, "less original and more predictable."<sup>102</sup> Daiches finds in him the Arnoldian trait of "echoing the best."<sup>103</sup> Laurence Lerner refers to him as a "child of I. A. Richards."<sup>104</sup> And there are some, who have qualified him as more "Eliotian than Eliot himself." Nevertheless, it is more correct to infer, that apart from Arnold, Dr. Leavis has been much influenced by "Eliot's earlier critical essays as also by the early Richards."<sup>105</sup>

We would like here to remove one misconceived notion. Dr. Leavis is not a verbal analyst of the line either of Richards or of his erstwhile disciple William Empson. Although, he relies too much on the "producible texts";<sup>106</sup> yet for no other purpose than to see, what he calls **the thing** he finds himself "needing to say."<sup>107</sup> Perhaps, his position is "more original",<sup>108</sup> and his tone "more his own".<sup>109</sup> His critical method may be stated as—

"Dr. Leavis opposed a *prior* theorising about literature criticism for him was a practical activity and properly consisted in the careful demonstration of the qualities of a work by a

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102 Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 208

103 Daiches David—*The Present Age*, p. 136

104 *Life and Death of Scrutiny*—*London Magazine*—(quoted) *The Literary Critics*, G. Watson, p. 208

105 Daiches David—*The Present Age*, p. 137

106 Leavis, F. R.—*Revaluation*, Introduction

107 *Ibid*

108. Daiches David—*The Present Age*, p. 137

109. *Ibid*

subtle blend of quotation, running commentary, and devices for communicating admiration or contempt<sup>110</sup>

And the aim of his criticism is best contained in the first editorial of the **Scrutiny**:—

“The general dissolution of standards is a common place. Those who are aware of the situation will be concerned to cultivate awareness and will be actively concerned for standards.”<sup>111</sup>

Taken together, the two statements may mean to suggest the critical credo of Dr Leavis. He is interested in establishing new literary standards or what Daiches has called in “ruthless sifting of the little wheat of good and serious literature from the abundant chaff of triviality and shodiness . . . .”<sup>112</sup> It is perhaps the same “ideal” which Eliot himself has qualified as the “sorting of certain books, certain essays, certain sentences, certain men, who have been “useful” to us.”<sup>113</sup> In his method, Leavis is certainly “more relevant, more rounded and more complete”<sup>114</sup> than either of the two, Arnold and Eliot. He is always furnishing details of quotation and commentary, in order to carry the reader with him.

Obviously, this habit of critical procedure in Leavis may be due to the fact, that unlike Eliot, he is primarily a teacher. His criticism involves a particular conception of “critical education”,<sup>115</sup> which at bottom, has always been moral. He displays a catholic disgust for mere “entertainment”<sup>116</sup> in literature. According to him, criticism is a very serious type of activity and the greatness of a work of literature consists in presenting a “genuine moral vision” of experience, communicated through a “fully particularised, and fully realised imaginative rendering of life.”<sup>117</sup> In **The Great Tradition**, Leavis

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110. Daiches David—*The Present Age*, p. 137.

111. *Scrutiny*.

112. Daiches David—*The Present Age*, p. 136

113. *Selected Prose, The Functions of Criticism*, p. 19.

114. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 158

115. *Ibid.*

116. Daiches David—*The Present Age*, p. 137

117. *Ibid.*

upholds the cause of three novelists George Eliot; Henry James, and Joseph Conrad. He feels that the great tradition in English novel has been the tradition of a serious moral concern. He calls these novelists, "significant in terms of that human awareness they promote, awareness of the possibilities of life."<sup>118</sup>

Leavis' reference to "human awareness" is really significant. His own understanding of such an awareness is not negative. It implies an explicit positiveness for "the possibilities of life." It is at this point that Eliot and Leavis tend to differ in their approach towards moral values. Eliot in this respect represents the Hulme-Baudelarian tradition of morality. Leavis, on the other hand, looks forward to a literature, which explicitly brings out a victory of "life" over its sordid irritants—irritants which try to devitalise human energy. Eliot's appreciation of Baudelaire's way of affirming life does not satisfy Leavis, for the simple reason, that the latter makes use of "negative emotions and attitudes"<sup>119</sup> in analysing, revealing and judging their negativity. His position is different. He stands for a positive affirmation of life—the kind of affirmation, which in one sense or the other, he happens to find in the novelists of **The Great Tradition**. But the affirmation of life Leavis envisages in a work of art, should in no case, be taken to mean an easy optimism towards life. It must involve a struggle, wherein its "radical and central" problems are "squarely faced."<sup>120</sup> The struggle within itself must be a struggle for the lived values of life. Art and literature, according to Leavis, further the emotional and spiritual health of the individual and community. What he really wants literature to achieve, is perhaps best explained in his own statement, where he defines the purpose of art as "serving the spontaneous—creative fullness of being."<sup>121</sup> His observations on Lawrence would clarify the point.—

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118. Leavis, F. R.—*The Great Tradition*, p. 2

119. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 191

120. *Ibid*

121. Leavis, F. R.—*D. H. Lawrence, Novelist*, p. 172.

"Lawrence stood for life, and shows in his criticism, tossed as it was, for the most part, in the most marginal way an extraordinarily quick and sure sense for the difference between what makes for life and that which makes against it"<sup>122</sup>

Leavis' comparison of Eliot with Flaubert is equally suggestive —

'One may not have thought of comparing Eliot's creative work to Flaubert's, but Eliot's attitude to life is, not less than Flaubert's, one of distaste and disgust'<sup>123</sup>

In fact, Leavis is attacking on a particular point of view, or what he himself calls a cult of art that amounts to "religion",<sup>124</sup> and the directing spirit of which is the "rejection of life"<sup>125</sup> Leavis prescribes that the artist's purpose should be to help people in exploring the "profound energies and vast potentialities of life."<sup>126</sup> It is on this count, that he criticises Eliot for "standing-off"<sup>127</sup> from life. He finds in Eliot a sort of "sickness of spirit", which he argues, "is certainly not less intense"<sup>128</sup> than that of Flaubert. Again, he praises Hopkins, because his poetry presents a kind of "triumph of the spirit."<sup>129</sup>

It is not within the purview of our discussion to either refute or subscribe to what Leavis has to say on Eliot, in this particular respect. We have quoted certain extracts from Leavis to show, that the two critics, though committed to moral values of literature, have their respective limitations and differences of approach.

Again, on the problem of Impersonality in Art, Leavis' position is different from that of Eliot. He does not agree with the Eliotian view that the writer as artist is different from the writer as man who experiences. Leavis feels that impersonality lies in the effect of the work rather than in the

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122. Leavis, F R—*The Common Pursuit*, p. 284

123. Leavis, F R—*D H Lawrence—Novelist*, p. 25

124. *Ibid.*

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 26

128. Leavis, F R—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 182.

129. *Ibid.*

work itself. Hence, the deepest values of the artist, which are personal, cannot be separated from his art. Buckley's observations in this respect are important:—

"The impersonality of art consists, for him, in having found, while remaining at the heart of human problems a point of rest from which to estimate one's values and to define one's own life, one's possibilities of full living, in relation to them."<sup>130</sup>

In this way, Leavis' concern in art is a concern for seeing the artist's "emotional" life as being "impersonalised."<sup>131</sup> According to him, an emotion which defines itself through the "actuality in the poem"<sup>132</sup> is an impersonal emotion. This again, is a position quite different from Eliot's concept of "extinction of personality", or that of the poet moving away from the "whirlpool of his own emotions."<sup>133</sup> Leavis does not conceive impersonality in terms of depersonalisation of emotions—a situation completely divorced from the inner life of the poet. On the other hand, he envisages a point distanced though it may be from the poet: yet it must be subjected to the control of intelligence. What Leavis wants is perhaps an integration of the "emotional quality" with the "executory functions" of intelligence.

The whole process appears to imply five significant points: first, the emotions are universalized; second, their general importance to the community is explored; third, they are made subservient to an accepted code of living; fourth, they become the means of serving particular interests of the poet; and lastly these interests are basically moral.<sup>134</sup>

In this way, Leavis' concept of Art is a sort of amalgam of manifold interests. It requires a specialised interplay of thought, and emotional equality, where the interest in "human centrality" forms its basic tenet. Leavis, unlike Eliot, does not consider poetic activity a process of pure creation; nor does he subscribe to the Eliotian view that the "material of

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130 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 183

131 *Ibid*

132 *Ibid*, p. 174

133 *Selected Prose*, p. 29

134 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 183.



the artist is not his beliefs as held, but his beliefs as felt.<sup>135</sup> He affirms that any creative impulse, howsoever strong, must necessarily form part of the poet's ethical concern, if it has to achieve the maximum results

If we view the Doctrine of Impersonality from the "technical"<sup>136</sup> angle—the view Leavis has so often insisted upon—then, both the critics happen to hold identical opinions. Eliot as well as Leavis believes that there is an inherent relation between technique and the feelings and attitudes which it goes to depict. Both of them, in theory as also in practice, have focussed attention on technique in terms of the "sensibility it expresses" Eliot had stated categorically that the change of sensibility demanded a change of idiom<sup>137</sup>; or that every vital development in language is a development of "feeling as well."<sup>138</sup> As for Leavis, he also expresses similar views —

"The technique that has mattered in our day is the outcome of an intense and highly conscious work of critical intelligence (which) necessarily preceded and accompanied the discovery of the new uses of words, the means of expressing or creating the new feelings and modes of thought, the new rhythms, the new versification"<sup>139</sup>

Paying tributes to Eliot, for "altering expression"<sup>140</sup> Leavis continues:—

"Eliot's best, his important criticism has an immediate relation to his technical problems, as the poet in that moment in history was faced with altering expression"<sup>141</sup>

As critics, Eliot and Leavis have stood for bettering the literary standards. Both devoted themselves to the hazardous task with an unfaltering sense of dedication. Both of them have struggled very hard to expose the laxity of modern cri-

135 Eliot, T S—UPUC, p 136

136 Leavis, F R—*T S Eliot's Stature as a Critic, Commentary*, November, 1958

137 Eliot, T S—*Poetry in the 18th Century, From Dryden to Johnson*

138. *Selected Prose*

139. Leavis, F R—*T S Eliot's Stature as a Critic*

140 Eliot, T. S—*Selected Prose*, p 154.

141. Leavis, F. R—*T S Eliot's Stature as a Critic*.

ticism—academic as well as journalistic. They have endeavoured hard to revalue English literary tradition and have given new directions to the total genre of literary criticism. In more than one sense, their pursuits may be called common. Leavis himself confesses —

“The title of a late collection of essays, *The Common Pursuit* (1952), derives from Eliot’s “The Function of Criticism”, “one of those essays of Mr Eliot which I most admire” “The critic should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks-ares to which we are all subject—and compose his difference with as many of his fellows as possible in the common pursuit of true judgement”<sup>142</sup>

Such puritanical stress on discipline and dedication in the common pursuit of “true judgement” may be described as the meeting ground in the literary practice of the two critics. But discipline in this sense should not be taken to mean any rigid subscription to some stereotyped method or school of criticism. Both Eliot and Leavis are clear on this point. Leavis acknowledges —

“to insist that literary criticism, is or should be, a specific discipline of intelligence is not to suggest that a serious interest in literature can confine itself to the kind of intensive local analysis associated with “practical criticism”—to the scrutiny of “words on the page”, in their minute relations, their effects of imagery and so on: a literary interest is an interest in man, society and civilization and its boundaries cannot be drawn”<sup>143</sup>

Eliot also states the same point but from a different angle.—

“The true literary mind is likely to develop slowly, it needs a more comprehensive and more varied diet, a more miscellaneous knowledge of facts, a greater experience of men and of ideas than the kind required for the practice of the other arts”<sup>144</sup>

The two statements, taken together, result in another common feature, which we discern in the comparative study of Eliot and Leavis: their literary interests converge with their interests in man, society and culture. In the scheme of their literary practice, the “cultural consciousness” occupies a very

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142 Leavis, F. R.—*Preface to The Common Pursuit*

143 Leavis, F. R.—*Scrutiny*, xiii, 1, 78

144 *Selected Prose*, p. 218

significant place. The process of equating "culture" with "criticism" which Arnold initiated has been further accelerated by Eliot, Richards and Leavis. In fact, Leavis' interpretation of culture, has something common to Eliot as well as to Richards. In his stress on "literary minority"<sup>145</sup> as a means of keeping alive the literary tradition, he comes closer to Eliot. But, in suggesting that by "Culture", he means the "use" of a language upon which "fine living depends",<sup>146</sup> Leavis, in one sense, implies to support Richards in his theory of Communication. Leavis maintains that many of the "subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition" are contained in our literature and language.

On the level of culture, we find many similarities between Eliot and Leavis. Leavis' notion of "literary minority" is somewhat analogous to Eliot's theory of "social classes." Second, both have opposed the present role of press, platform, cinema and shallow literature. Third, they are deadly against the growing ills of the Post-Industrial-Society. Fourth, both of them have continuously attacked Marx for his dialectical materialism of a social alternative. Lastly, they agree that the old "organic community" is gradually disintegrating due to the compulsions of an Industrial society.

Before we wind up our present discussion, it appears advisable to refer to an oft-repeated charge against Eliot. Like many other critics, Leavis opposes the Eliotian dictum that "literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint."<sup>147</sup> Leavis' criticism of this dictum is based on two counts: intellectually, it being dogmatic, sounds irrational, practically, Eliot's own practice displays the tendency of "substituting theological considerations for literary rather than completing one with the other."<sup>148</sup> Leavis, in his own criticism, also stresses on the need of ethical standards but has nowhere said that "theological considerations are

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145 Leavis, F. R.—*Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*, pp. 3-5

146. Leavis,—*Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*

147. *Selected Prose Religion and Literature*<sup>1925</sup>

148 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 218

necessary"<sup>149</sup> Without involving ourselves into further arguments we shall simply say that the position taken by Leavis is equally not so relevant Bethal rightly points out:—

"If the critic elects to take his stand on "ethics" without any philosophical examination of the matter, there will always be a chance that his ethics may consist of personal predilections or the assumptions of his own social group"<sup>150</sup>

In conclusion, we may suggest that Eliot and Leavis are both "moralists"<sup>151</sup> in one way or the other. Each of them finds the moral value "co-extensive with the artistic value"<sup>152</sup> of any work Neither of them tries to replace "aesthetic values as a substitute",<sup>153</sup> for life. Lastly, they appear to be "preoccupied with almost similar problems",<sup>154</sup> that face life, literature and society We refrain from determining the personal contribution, which Leavis has made to the cause of English literary criticism We only refer to the quantum of success that *Scrutiny* has achieved under the able stewardship of Dr F. R. Leavis —

"Richards wrote *Practical Criticism* but *Scrutiny* was practical and criticised Cleanth Brooks wrote notes for a new history of English poetry but in essay after essay *Scrutiny* accumulated a new history in *extenso* Burke and Ransom extended the boundaries of critical discussion but *Scrutiny* actually occupied the territory and issued new maps"<sup>155</sup>

The discussion on "Eliot and the formalistic critics" involves, first of all, the study of those essentials, which are generally attributed to the Formalists. In the words of Austin Warren.—

"Modern critics limiting themselves to aesthetic criticism are commonly called "formalists"—sometimes by themselves, some-

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149 Bethal, S L.—*Essays on Literary Criticism and The English Tradition*, p 13

150 *Ibid*

151 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p 18

152 *Ibid*

153 *Ibid.*

154 *Ibid*

155 Bentley—Eric—*Kenyon Review*, Autumn, 1946, quoted in *The Modern Age*, ed Boris Ford, p 360

times (pejoratively) by others. As least as ambiguous is the cognate word "form." As we shall use it here, it names the aesthetic structure of a literary work—that which makes it literature. Instead of dichotomising "form-content" we should think of matter and then of "form", that which aesthetically organizes its matter. In a successful work of art, the materials are completely assimilated into the form: what was 'world' has become language.<sup>156</sup>

The formalistic criticism, then, aims first at the "aesthetic structure" of art. Second, it does not dichotomise "form" from "content." Third, to the "formalists" the matter precedes the "form." Fourth, it is the "form" which aesthetically "organises" the matter. Lastly, such an organisation is not to be superficial or ordinary: it must assimilate the matter into the form or what Warren calls a sort of transformation of the "world" into "language." Briefly speaking, the "dynamics of the aesthetic purpose"<sup>157</sup> is the only consideration with the formalists. According to them, it is this "purpose" that synthesizes the words, ideas and experiences of a poem into a kind of polyphonic relations.<sup>158</sup> In this way, a beautiful poem may become "manifoldly organised",<sup>159</sup> and thus embody "various levels of meaning, and pattern associations."<sup>160</sup> Eliot, though in a different context touches the same point. While referring to the plays of Shakespeare, he says:—

"For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and conflict of character, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the musically sensitive the rhythm and for auditors of greater understanding and sensitiveness a meaning which reveals itself gradually."<sup>161</sup>

Eliot and the critics of the formalistic school have similar views on what Nietzsche and Richards formulate as the concept of "poetry of inclusion."<sup>162</sup> Diversity of the material; ambiguity in the language, and intensity in the use of irony and

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156 Warren Austin—*Theory of Literature*, p. 241

157 *Ibid.*

158 *Ibid.*

159. *Ibid.*

160 *Ibid.*

161 Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 153.

162 *Ibid.*

metaphor are some of the basic points, where the majority of the formalistic critics have generally voiced their agreement with the critical line of T. S. Eliot. As to the view of the "Formalists" that "form and content" should not be dichotomised, Eliot also holds almost the same view.<sup>163</sup>

Austin Warren has criticised the following dictum of Eliot:—

"The view of life presented in a poem must be one which the critic can accept as coherent, mature and found on the facts of experience"<sup>164</sup>

He argues that the dictum in its phrasing "goes beyond any formalism."<sup>165</sup> He concedes that "coherence" is an "aesthetic" as well as "logical criterion",<sup>166</sup> but "maturity" and "truth to experience" are different things. One is psychological criterion, while the other is an appeal to worlds "outside the work of art."<sup>167</sup> His other observations are significant:—

"Let us reply to Eliot that the maturity of a work of art is its inclusiveness, its awareness of complexity, its ironies and tensions, and the correspondence between a novel and experience can never be measured by any simple pairing off of items what we can legitimately compare is the total world of Dickens, Kafka, Balzac or Tolstoy with our total experience, that is our own thought and felt "world"<sup>168</sup>

As a matter of fact, the formalistic criticism owes much to Eliot for its development. He may be said to have laid down the basis of this school of criticism. Guided by Pound, Hulme and other symbolists, Eliot stressed on the high values of art as "art", rather than art as "expression of social, religious, ethical or political ideas"<sup>169</sup> He strongly advocates the close study of the texts, puts forth the view of poetry

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163 Eliot, T S—*Introduction to Ezra Pound*

164 Eliot, T S—UPUC., p. 96.

165. Warren Austin—*Theory of Literature*, p. 24.

166 *Ibid*

167. *Theory of Literature*, p. 24

168 *Ibid*.

169 Scott Wilbur, S—*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, p. 179.

having "autotelic character",<sup>170</sup> develops the cult of impersonality, and warns the critics against their habit of what he calls "inquiring into the number of times giraffes are mentioned in the English novel."<sup>171</sup> He also pleads for moving away from the biographical details and other unnecessary facts, irrelevant to literature as such. In short, Eliot, from the beginning, shows his serious concerns to formulate a kind of criticism, which in concept and character, is entirely free from the exigencies of extrinsically historic, moral, psychological and sociological interpretations."<sup>172</sup> Later, the efforts of I. A. Richards and William Empson, further strengthen the formalistic approach, which in the wake of the thirties becomes so popular that it draws into its fold, such brilliant scholars as Wilson Knight, John Crowe Ransom, R. P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren and Yvor Winters. Although, there exist considerable differences among them yet they are best recognised by their "common beliefs, attitudes and practices."<sup>173</sup> Robert Penn Warren's observations appear to sum up the position of the Formalists —

"Poetry does not inhere in any particular element but depends upon the set of relationships, the structure, which we call the poem."<sup>174</sup>

"Structure" in this sense holds the key to the entire complexion of the poem. It binds together, not superficially but organically, different elements that constitute the total poetic experience. It comprises not only the form but content also. Hence, to the formalist, the full meaning of the poem lies in the complete discernment of its structural implications, wherein both form and content are fused together for the artistic presentation of the poetic experience.

Doubtless to say that the formalistic approach has been regarded as one of the most influential methods of literary criticism. The other names which have acquired currency for

170. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 47.

171. *Selected Prose*, p. 19.

172. Scott Wilbur, S.—*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, p. 180.

173. *Ibid*, p. 184.

174. Warren, R. P.—*"Pure and Impure Poetry"*

this method are. the aesthetic, the textual, the ontological or most frequently used the "new criticism."<sup>175</sup> As already stated, the critics belonging to the formalistic school have their own differences among themselves. But as soon as "the exposition of theory is abandoned, and the critical performance begins",<sup>176</sup> their inherent kinship is established. They may disagree in the matter of working out details, yet in their total outlook, there appears to exist a good deal of near similarity. All of them agree that a poem has an independent organism. Second, they regard poetry as a "valid source of knowledge" that cannot be communicated in terms "other than its own."<sup>177</sup> Third, they lay an unusual emphasis on the "relationships structurally present",<sup>178</sup> in the poem for any competent reader. Fourth, all of them prescribe a close study of the texts. Lastly, what most of them want to maintain, is that the poem is not only a cause or a potential cause of the reader's "poetic experience", but a specific, highly-organised control of the reader's experience, so that the experience is most fittingly described as—the "experience of the poems."<sup>179</sup> To the inquiry as to what the "new critics" have achieved on the practical plane, we quote here, a summary appraisal of William K. Wimsatt, who says.—

"Impersonality, craftsmanship, objectivity, hardness and clarity of a kind, a union of emotion with verbal object, a norm of inclusiveness and reconciliation and hence a close interdependence of drama, irony, ambiguity and metaphor, or the near equivalence of these four—such ideas made up the neo-classic system as it worked its way into practical criticism about 1935 or 1940."<sup>180</sup>

Coming to the individual critics, we find that William Empson's contribution to the development of formalistic cri-

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175 Scott, Wilbur—*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, p. 179.

176 *Ibid*

177. *Ibid*, p. 181

178 Warren Austin—*Theory of Literature*, p. 249

179 *Ibid*

180 Wimsatt & Brooks—*Literary Criticism. A Short History*, p. 731



ticism has been very promising in the initial stages. His efforts in collaboration with that of Richards towards the investigation of meaning have led to the rise of the semantics—the science of signs and sign interpretations. His two major works—**Seven Types of Ambiguity** and **The Structure of Complex Words**—embody the whole of his technique of the verbal analysis. We must bear in mind that Empson did not invent any new technique. What he did, was, first, the systematization of the methods of verbal and structural analysis; and second, he popularised much of its “characteristic jargon”—“ambiguity”, “irony” and “tension.”<sup>181</sup> Eliot has criticised Richards and Empson for what he alleges, the “lemon-squeezer school of criticism.”<sup>182</sup> Perhaps, on the figurative use of “irony” and the place of “ambiguity” and “tension” in a poem, both Eliot and Empson have almost similar views.<sup>183</sup> They have voiced their stern opposition to Richards’ concept of “emotive use of language”, though for reasons quite different to each other’s.

R. P. Blackmur is another major critic, whose passion for “form” is known. He may be said to belong to the coterie of the more analytical of the aesthetic critics. In **“The Double Agent; Essays in Craft and Elucidation”**, he has tried to apply analytical techniques as elaborately as I. A. Richards and William Empson have done. Blackmur’s essay **“T. S. Eliot: From Ash Wednesday to Murder in the Cathedral”** shows the nature and degree of influence Eliot has left on him. Moreover, his catholic concern for the “meaningful expression in art”,<sup>184</sup> again displays the same and oft-repeated Eliotian emphasis on the right use of words. His observations for example:—

“Language is made of words and gesture is made of motion  
 . . . when the language of words most succeeds it becomes  
 gesture in its words”<sup>185</sup>

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181 Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 206

182. Eliot, T S—*OPP*, p. 113

183 Wimsatt & Brooks—*Literary Criticism; A Short History*.

184 Blackmur, A P—*Language as Gesture*, p. 3.

185. *Ibid*

give the impression that Blackmur is re-iterating that which Eliot had already affirmed in the essay on "**The Music of Poetry.**"<sup>186</sup>

In more than one sense, Kenneth Burke's position is similar to that of Blackmur. Both share the view that the language of poetry may be regarded as "symbolic action."<sup>187</sup> In the words of Blackmur:—

"Mr Burke legislates, I would judge, the executive is between us."<sup>188</sup>

Both the critics have moved more and more to the Em-  
psonian directions of minute analysis and dissection.

Kenneth Burke is a philosopher-cum-critic. He is basically an aesthete, but has tried to modify his position under the compulsions of social and political forces. **The Counter-Statement** may be considered a brilliant work on the study of poetry in which Burke has investigated into two major problems: the literary form, and the psychological aspects of aesthetics. In his later works. **Permanence and Change; An Anatomy of Purpose; The Philosophy of Form; and A Grammar of Rhetoric**, Burke has synthesized his concept of literature as pure art with his ideas of social and human values. It is a position, which if not anything else, is essentially Eliotic.

As a critic—Robert Penn Warren is as precise as one could wish.<sup>189</sup> He happens to be an eminent scholar, a successful teacher, a distinguished poet, an influential critic and an able novelist. Politically speaking, Warren is a liberal; yet he professes to judge art on the ground of its inner integrity than on anything else. Warren stands for the poetry of "inclusion."<sup>190</sup> On the function of irony, his approach is perfectly consistent with that of Eliot and Richards.<sup>191</sup> His own

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186 Eliot, T S—O P P, p 26

187 Blackmur, R P—*Language as Gesture*, p 3

188 *Ibid*

189 Cunliffe Marcus (ed)—*The Literature of the United States*  
p 335

190 Wimsatt & Brooks—*Literary Criticism—A Short History*,  
pp 646-47.

191 *Ibid*

poetry bears testimony to the influences of the metaphysical poets. In Warren's view, the characteristic weakness of the "pure" poetry lies in what he calls the unwillingness to face up to the "other possible case."<sup>192</sup> The avoidance of any manifestation of "irony and witty intellection"<sup>193</sup> weakens rather than strengthens its appeal. Both Warren and Eliot appear to subscribe to the same point of view. Poetry in their opinion is an all "inclusive" art, which further implies that it must be "complex"<sup>194</sup> hence "difficult"<sup>195</sup> also. Warren's own observations on this point are significant.—

"The saint proves his vision by stepping cheerfully into the fires. The poet somewhat less spectacularly, proves his vision by submitting it to the fires of irony—to the drama of his structure—in the hope that fires will refine it. In other words, the poet wishes to indicate that his vision has been earned, that it can survive reference to the complexities and contradictions of reference. And irony is one such device of reference."<sup>196</sup>

The name of Cleanth Brooks is closely associated with R. P. Warren not only for the marked similarity of their critical approach, but also for their close collaboration in bringing out some of their major literary works. In *Understanding Poetry*, the two critics voice their strong disapproval of the "use of 'Poetry' for any purpose beyond itself."<sup>197</sup> Like Eliot, both of them are in favour of shunning all sort of historical and biographical details, being brought into the evaluation of a poem.

"Warren's accounts of 'The Ancient Mariner' and Brooks' assemblage of analysis entitled 'The Well Wrought Urn,'" says Watson, "are strikingly indifferent to historical probability."<sup>198</sup> Brooks himself observes.—

"If literary history has not been emphasized, it is not because,

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192 Warren, R. P.—"Pure & Impure Poetry", *Kenyon Review*.

193 Wimsatt & Brooks—*Literary Criticism*, p. 646.

194 *Ibid.*, p. 651.

195 *Selected Prose, The Metaphysical Poets*, p. 105.

196 Warren, R. P.—"Pure and Impure Poetry".

197. Warren & Brooks—*Understanding Poetry*, *Preface*.

198 Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 221.

I discount its importance, or because I have failed to take it into account. It is rather that I have been anxious to see what residuum, if any, is left, after we have referred the poem to its cultural matrix."<sup>199</sup>

**The Well Wrought Urn** shows Brooks' concerns with the methods in which a "great poem succeeds."<sup>200</sup> According to him, poetry such as that of the metaphysical poets, unites "apparent paradoxes"<sup>201</sup> by way of metaphor. The greatness of a poem lies, in this way, in the "balance or reconciliation" of opposite or "discordant qualities."<sup>202</sup> He concedes to art the highest values, and like other new critics, feels that the work of art exists 'apart from everydayness.'<sup>203</sup> In the appreciation of the metaphysicals, Brooks like Warren, is by the right side of Eliot.

The two distinguished scholars, who have done much for the cause of the New Criticism, are John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate. Both belong to the Agrarian group and have remained for some time, closely associated with **The Fugitive**—a magazine of the Southern letters, wedded to the ideals of an agrarian economy and its allied aesthetic and socio-cultural values. They are neo-Aristotelians in the sense that in their critical thought, they dislike the "Platonic forms of literature",<sup>204</sup> which fail to bring out the required fusion, that one finds in the metaphysicals, Donne in particular. It may be said, that their approach in criticism is predominantly aesthetic or formalistic rather than "sociological, historical, psychological, economic or moral."<sup>205</sup> Ransom has vehemently criticised some of the current statements of T. S. Eliot.

Ransom's output—poetic and critical—is small, but "consistently distinguished."<sup>206</sup> **The New Criticism** is his standard

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199 Brooks Cleanth—*The Well Wrought Urn*, Preface

200 Cunliffe Marcus—*Literature of the United States*, p. 335

201 *Ibid*

202 *Ibid*

203 *Ibid*

204 *The Literature of the United States, Pelican Original*, p. 334

205 *Ibid*

206 *Recent American Literature*, Little Field, Adams & Co., p. 277.

work on the development of recent critical thought and its practice. Like any other formalist, he is deeply interested in the structure of poetry. He has developed his own view of good poetry which he contends, depends on the quality of "texture". His definition, that a "poem is a loose logical structure, having an irrelevant local texture"<sup>207</sup> has been received with mixed feelings in literary quarters. Ransom's explanatory observations, in this respect, are significant.—

"By ontological insight the critic is to notice how particulars are a matter of texture, and universals of structure—and how both must be present in a poem as in a furnished house, in which the paint, the paper, the tapestry are texture"<sup>208</sup>

Ransom's theorisation on poetry is valuable. He feels that a poem consists of "structure" as well as "texture". He suggests that the structure is to be "loose" but "logical"; while the texture "irrelevant". He further argues, that though the texture is entirely irrelevant to the structure of the poem, yet it has its own share in moulding the poem by what he calls, the process of "impeding the logic or the argument." In this context, the irrelevance of the texture plays a vital role: it enhances the impact and incidence of logic by focusing on different aspects of reality with which logic cannot cope.<sup>209</sup> To put it in another way, what Ransom implies by texture, is perhaps what Winters has explained.—

"feeling or emotion as existing independently of structure and yet in some obscure manner not wholly escaping from its presence"<sup>210</sup>

His own declaration points to the same direction.—

"The more difficult the final structure, the less rich should be the distraction of the texture, and the richer the texture as we proceed towards the structure, the more generalised and simple may be the structure in the end"<sup>211</sup>

Ransom's whole position is not difficult to understand.

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207 John Crowe—*The New Criticism*, p. 280

208 *Ibid*

209 Wimsatt & Brooks—*Literary Criticism, A Short History*, p. 626

210 Winters Yvor—*In Defence of Reason*, p. 534

211 Ransom, John Crowe—*The New Criticism*, p. 274.

The structure of a poem is not important in itself. It is important as a means to something else. It must justify its existence by catering to the psychological needs of the readers. On the other hand, the texture of the "perceptual impulses" is more important and it is through texture that they become gratified. Ransom states the same position, though in a paradoxical manner:—

"The paraphrase of a poem is a fair version of the logical structure and since the paraphrase of even a fine poem usually reveals an undistinguished and common place argument, the structure is not the valuable element of the poem"<sup>212</sup>

In his theory of "structure and texture" Ransom seems to be nearer to Richards than to Eliot. He has tried to give it a cognitive complexion, yet the implications involved are no less simple.

Ransom objects to the immediate transference of emotions from the poet to the reader. Such immediacy, he feels, blinds the poet to the texture of the emotion. As against Eliot's theory of "Objective Correlative", Ransom holds the doctrine of the "Automatic Accuracy"<sup>213</sup> of emotions. According to him, emotions are motivated by some cause or object and are appropriate.<sup>214</sup> If the cognition of the object is sound, the emotion automatically becomes accurate. He observes —

"The specific quality of any emotion is all but indefinable in pure emotive terms, and that seems to be because the distinctness that we think of as attaching to an emotion belongs really to the object toward which we have it."<sup>215</sup>

Ransom virtually reverses Eliot's concept of "Objective Correlative" when he asserts.—

"In short, the one automatic and sure method of identifying a feeling is to furnish an objective situation and say Now imagine yourself in this situation. Under these circumstances I do not see why the critic needs to do more than talk about

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212 Ransom, John Crowe—(quoted) *Literary Criticism*, Wimsatt and Brooks

213 Winters Yvor—*In Defence of Reason*, p. 525

214 *Ibid.*, p. 524

215. Ransom John Crowe—*The New Criticism*, p. 60

the objective situations. The feelings will be then strict correlates and the pursuit of the feelings will be gratuitous."<sup>216</sup>

Ransom also criticises Eliot's view of metaphysical poetry —

"My belief is that opposites can never be said, to be resolved or reconciled merely because they have been got into the same poem, or got into the same complex of affective experience to create there a kind of tension."<sup>217</sup>

He feels that the two discordant experiences cannot be fused together. He asserts that in a pointed form of irony, the oppositions produce an "indecisive effect."<sup>218</sup> Such a device brings irresolution and strikes at the "structural unity"<sup>219</sup> of the poem itself. In fact, Ransom displays his dissatisfaction unsparingly against Eliot and Richards for advocating the "reconciliation" of what he thinks are "irreconcilables."<sup>220</sup>

Ransom has voiced his strong disagreement with Eliot on another fundamental point. The latter's affirmation that the poem has a "life of its own", is according to Ransom, "very nearly a doctrine of poetic automatism."<sup>221</sup> He contends that poet's function, being very important, he must exercise full control over the poem. Any slackness on that score is bound to result in serious derelictions of art itself.

We have tried here, to summarise in the span of our brief discussion, some of the distinctive features of Ransom's criticism in relation to that of Eliot. As it stands, Ransom thinks Eliot's criticism too psychologistic, too much concerned with affective experience and too little cognitive."<sup>222</sup> Both the critics have got their own differences—differences, which may be said to arise out of their respective approaches of literary

216 *The New Criticism*, p. 50

217 *Ibid.*, p. 95

218 *Ibid.*, p. 152

219 *Ibid.*, p. 95

220 Wimsatt and Brooks—*Literary Criticism, A Short History*, p. 621

221 Ransom, J. Crowe—*The New Criticism*, p. 152

222 Wimsatt and Brooks—*Literary Criticism, A Short History*, p. 669

criticism. Anyhow, we would like to quote two "recantations",<sup>223</sup> which Ransom has made about Eliot after his death. He says —

"The first time I scolded him for *The Waste Land*, with what I took to be its academic trick of recondite allusions on the one hand, and on the other hand, its want of a firm and consistent prosody, such as it seemed to require. I was mistaken about the allusions."<sup>224</sup>

He continues.—

"My other unfortunate estimate of Eliot came when I wrote a harsh review of *Murder in the Cathedral*. I read the play at one sitting and wrote my piece the next day at another sitting. The trouble was that in that period, I was studying my Milton, and had a special liking for *Samson Agonistes* over all his other works. *The Murder* like the *Samson* was in Greek form of drama, but it seemed to me that the *Murder* was always running wild, and rejecting its form. But I was able after a little while to be reasonable and to reflect that the form of drama is subject to changes as soon as a new and able dramatist wants it so and that as a rule the new wine tastes better to his own public than the old."<sup>225</sup>

Allen Tate's concern with criticism is well known. He has been a teacher, editor, poet and critic. But, it is primarily as critic that he has distinguished himself in American letters. Tate may be regarded as one of the enthusiastic exponents of the "New Criticism." In his practical criticism, he has always laid great stress on the study of the text. He demands from the author a high degree of intellectual discipline; so that the personal in him is restrained at a reasonable distance. He believes in values and aspires for moral and emotional integrity.

Tate defines poetry as an "action rendered in its totality"<sup>226</sup>—an action which is prescriptive neither of means nor of ends. Like Eliot, he insists on its organic nature, where words, metaphors, similes, etc., join together for bringing out

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223 Tate Allen (ed.)—*T. S. Eliot, The Man and His Work*, p. 133

224 *Ibid*

225 *Ibid*, pp. 134-35

226. Tate Allen—*On the Limits of Poetry*, p. 113



a cumulative effect. "The vision of the whole", Tate asserts, "is not susceptible of logical demonstration."<sup>227</sup> Hence, the poem is not a statement in the ordinary sense, that can be logically proved. As such, it cannot be subjected to external verifications. Its grasp may vary from one reader to the other, depending of course, on the imaginative competency of the readers. Tate also denounces the "belief that language itself can be reality, or by incantation can create a reality"<sup>228</sup>

Tate makes another significant point. He asserts that similes and metaphors should "grow out of the material"<sup>229</sup> and a poet must not impose them "from above." It implies: that a poet does not proceed in a pre-determined manner; that no manner, whatsoever, hinders the process of poetic creation; that the creation, while in the process of development, furnishes its own norms; and finally, that the poet reveals the very patterns inherent in his own experience. What Tate appears to confirm is that a poem, in its totality, is not a mere "subjective projection"—a notion, very similar to that of Eliot. Even imagination, though subtle, must obey some laws implicit in the human psyche, or what Tate suggests, "submit to analogy—analogy to the natural world."<sup>230</sup> Significantly enough, Allen Tate's position in respect of the poet's "fostering and nurturing the poem's life", on the principles of natural growth, seems analogous to the one Eliot has so consistently held.

The name of Yvor Winters requires special mention. Though, his too much pre-occupations with moral values have made some critics<sup>231</sup> declare him, a critic of the moralistic school; yet his strict adherence to classical virtues and his strong advocacy of structural organisms, bracket him with the formalists—maybe, a formalist with some difference. Like Blackmur, Ransom and Tate, he also lays his fingers on form, but his approach is somewhat different. "Form", to Winters,

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227. Tate Allen—*On the Limits of Poetry*, p 113

228. Tate Allen—*The Forlorn Demon*, p 61

229. Tate Allen—*On the Limits of Poetry*, p. 92.

230. Tate Allen—*The Forlorn Demon*, p 78

231. Scott Wilbur, S—*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, p 25.

is not mere architectonics of poetry; it embodies an ideal and a vision. As a critic, Winters shows a puritan interest in the study of the text. He has criticised Eliot's literary theories. "Eliot", he alleges, "is a theorist, who has repeatedly contradicted himself on every important issue that he has touched."<sup>232</sup> He further argues that "his intellectualism and his reactionary position are alike an illusion."<sup>233</sup> He criticises<sup>234</sup> Eliot's concept of art as "autotelic."<sup>235</sup> Commenting on the analogy of the catalyst which Eliot has propounded, Winters asserts —

"I should like to suggest that it describes more accurately the facts which Eliot appears to have in mind than does the theory of Eliot himself."<sup>236</sup>

He goes on. —

"According to my view, the artistic process is one of moral evaluation of human experience by means of a technique which renders possible an evaluation more precise than any other."<sup>237</sup>

Winters contends that the feelings which art expresses should be "motivated by the artists' comprehension of his subject."<sup>238</sup> Moreover, it is on the "justness of the motivation", in whole and in detail, that the value of art depends. But, "Eliot", says Winters, "prefers to assume emotion as initial."<sup>239</sup> Criticising Eliot's Theory of Objective Correlatives,<sup>241</sup> Winters affirms: —

"This seems to me, I confess, a reversal of the normal processes of understanding human experience, and a dangerous reversal."<sup>242</sup>

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232 Winters, Yvor—*In Defence of Reason, The Illusion of Reason*, p 460

233 *Ibid*

234 *Ibid*, p 462

235 *Selected Essays*, p 19

236 Winters, Yvor—*In Defence of Reason*, p 464

237 *Ibid*

238 *Ibid*

239. *Ibid*.

240 *Ibid*.

241 Eliot, T S—*Selected Prose*, p 102

242. Winters, Yvor—*In Defence of Reason*, p 467

Winters criticises Eliot, for what he reiterates as "giving primacy to the emotions"<sup>241</sup>. "To take them as they come", he says, "is a dangerous practice."<sup>241</sup> It is not possible to control them in this way. The control over emotions requires the presence of a rational structure or what Winters calls "the formulable logic"<sup>242</sup> that is, the theme can be "paraphrased in general terms"<sup>243</sup>. In Winters' view, if we express our emotions without understanding them, "we obviously have no way of judging or controlling them."<sup>247</sup> Hence, he launches another attack on Eliot —

"It is possible of course, as Eliot somewhere else remarks, to admire a poem deeply, without wholly understanding it but such admiration must rest on an understanding at least imperfect, and the idea that this admiration is adequate as compared with that which comes with full understanding is mere nonsense"<sup>246</sup>

Winters has criticised<sup>250</sup> Eliot's view, that "all poetry, even a lyric from the Greek anthology, is dramatic."<sup>250</sup> According to him, a "poem is a statement about an experience, real or imagined." Elucidating his point further, Winters says that it is an act of meditation or what he calls "the event plus the understanding of the event."<sup>251</sup> He voices his disagreement with Matthiessen who had interpreted dramatic element in poetry as "its power to communicate a sense of real life, a sense of the immediate present."<sup>252</sup> Winters alleges that Matthiessen is "merely indulging in incoherence."<sup>253</sup> The final attack on Eliot is based on:—

"No matter how the doctrine of dramatic immediacy is understood, it is a doctrine which leads to illegitimate emotionalism,

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243 *In Defence of Reason*, p. 469.

244 *Ibid*, p. 473

245 *Ibid*, p. 31

246 *Ibid*

247 *Ibid*, p. 469.

248 *Ibid*, p. 473

249 *Ibid*, p. 489

250. *Selected Essays*, "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry", p. 38

251. Winters, Yvor—*In Defence of Reason*, p. 489

252. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 66.

253. Winters, Yvor—*In Defence of Reason*, p. 490

and understood as it appears in Eliot's practice, it leads to nicelance and to incoherence as well."<sup>254</sup>

We may be allowed to point out here, some implicit confusion in the bold assertions of Winters. He appears to disregard "dramatic presentation", because it implies an abdication of the poet's control over his "statement" or what he himself refers to as "illegitimate emotionalism." But, Winters' own preference for the term "motive" vis-a-vis his definition of a poem as "statement" actually points to the same direction—"the mode of drama."<sup>255</sup> Cleanth Brooks rightly observes

"For if the emotions are "motivated", the emotion can only be inferred from the context of situation and action. It can not be stated directly, and the paraphrasable matter that "motivates" it is not so much a 'statement' as a dramatic situation—a narrative or a plot."<sup>256</sup>

Before we close our assessment of the Formalistic critics, we would like to mention some of the limitations these critics have suffered from. First, it has been generally felt that the majority of the formalists have tried to isolate the part of a poem from its whole. Second, they have stretched the technique of analysis to such rigid extremes that the very sense of the whole is eclipsed by the part. Third, they are so lost in the ontological formalities as to forget completely the poem in its totality. Lastly, there has grown a general feeling against most of the critics of this school, that they have neglected the values of literature to man as merely an "aesthetic being",<sup>257</sup> in favour of the analysis of form. But, with all its limitations, the formalistic movement has brought into its fold, some of the best critical talents available on either side of the Atlantic. As for its practical working, we give below the observations of R. C. Crane:—

"Looked at broadly or from a distance, the movement exhibits a striking unity of spirit and method, as well as a re-

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254 *In Defence of Reason*, p. 493

255. Brooks Cleanth—*Literary Criticism, A Short History*, p. 675.

256 *Ibid*

257 Scott, Wilbur, S—*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*,

markable tendency to mutual admiration on the part of its adherents. Considered more closely, however, the apparent homogeneity of the "new criticism" is seen to be less complete than is often thought, and it is not hard to discover beneath the common preoccupation of these critics with "language", "symbol", and "meaning", at least two distinct ways, which are often associated in individual critics, of getting at the semantic nature of poetry and hence of defining the characteristic symbolic structures that condition its meanings and values."<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Crane, R. S.—*The Languages of Criticism and The Structure of Poetry*, p. 100.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE IMPACT OF ELIOT ON CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM

It is not too much to acknowledge that T. S. Eliot has left a considerable impact on contemporary criticism. But, its nature is such which defies every attempt of statistical assessment, the reason being three-fold: first, it is spread over a span of nearly fifty years; second, it is rhetorical and complex in character; and third, the critic in Eliot has shifted his own positions. It is in this context that Watson calls the influence "mysterious and indefinable."<sup>1</sup> Buckley interprets it in terms of a "new way of literary thinking of the past",<sup>2</sup> Luis Kronenberger of *The New York Times* qualifies it as an influence more of "style than of anything else",<sup>3</sup> and Sean Lucy sees it having a "decisive effect on the poetry of Realist Movement."<sup>4</sup> Irrespective of what different critics have said on Eliot, there exists a glaring unanimity on one distinctive feature of his literary criticism: it has turned upside-down the whole current of English literary criticism. It has won loud applause and yet its criticism is no less adverse. As a consequence, Eliot has exposed himself to a large number of opponents and disciples alike, who belong to every part of the globe.

Referring to the apparent shift of emphasis in the critical approach of Eliot, Watson has suggested the relevance of three voices in his criticism.<sup>5</sup> Biographically, the three voices cor-

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1 Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 178

2 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 87

3 Brown, Francis—*Highlights of Modern Literature* (Collection), p. 90.

4 Lucy Sean—*Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 150

5 Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 195

respond to three distinct periods in the career of T. S. Eliot—the pre-Christian (1919-28), the post-conversion (1929-39); and finally, the last decades (1939-65). Literarily, the first decade is the most productive in as far as it reveals the intrinsic merit of the sixteenth and seventeenth century dramatists and poets. The second decade is marked by an unusual stress on the social uses of literature and the last decades highlight, once again, the renewal of Eliot's greater interest in dramatic and other critical issues. Chronologically, the first and the last decades synchronise with the best of Eliot's critical and creative endeavours, while the period in between them—the thirties—shows his pre-occupations, not so much with poetry and criticism, as with their ethical and theological uses. Vincent Buckley, while discussing the relative effect of this ethical concern, has made a pointed reference to the damage thus done to Eliot's critical faculty —

“He seems no longer capable of driving the scalpel of his finely discriminating intelligence into the very fibre and tissue of a literary work seen as a living whole, and he is too quick to take up questions (such as the theological orientation of a poet or a novelist) which are certainly important, but which in his hands come to seem the central ones and to overshadow others quite as important.”<sup>6</sup>

As compared to other treatises, *The Sacred Wood* occupies a unique place. It forms the central core of Eliot's achievement as a critic. Some of its essays have come to stay as the un-official manifesto of his literary criticism. It is through these essays that Eliot rejects too much individualistic and liberal cults of Georgian criticism. The two essays, **Tradition** and **The Individual Talent**; and **The Functions of Criticism**; envisage a plan of some positive principles and methods. The originality of these essays does not lie so much in the doctrines formulated therein, as in their application to the immediate critical situation, which dominated the first two decades of the century. The first phase, in one way, may be said to aim at refining and modifying classicism, which by that time, had become “coarse and self-deviating.”<sup>7</sup> It is important to note

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6 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 129

7. *Ibid.*, p. 87

that Eliot's whole critical outlook at this stage, stands in direct reaction to the decayed romantic emotionalism of the Georgians. His three-pronged emphasis on the value of tradition, the extinction of personality, and the need for a more objective and factual criticism are the expressions of an unhidden longing for a criticism, which is substantively unemotional and impersonal. Sean Lucy in this respect makes out an important point —

"It was this need for an objective and factual literary criticism that found the most immediate popularity and support and which with the appearance of *The Sacred Wood* did much to set a fashion that became known as the New Criticism"<sup>8</sup>

Examined through the contemporary setting, the point raised by Sean Lucy is very significant. May be, on the face of it, none would easily agree to share any such view that **The Sacred Wood** alone could set in motion the processing of a new mode of literary criticism; and yet **The Sacred Wood** stands monumental to the genius of Eliot. With its rhetorical brilliance, pontifical tone, intuitional emphases and an ever growing disregard of historical details, it may claim its humble share in stimulating, what later on, is known as **The New Criticism**.

Oddly enough, Eliot does not share the views expressed by Sean Lucy. In the **Frontiers of Criticism**, he disclaims the responsibility of "any critical movement which can be said to derive from myself."<sup>9</sup> For the sake of a better and deeper understanding of the issues involved, we quote the full extract:—

"I have been somewhat bewildered to find, from time to time, that I am regarded as one of the ancestors of modern criticism, if too old to be a modern critic myself. Thus in a book which, I read recently by an author, who is certainly a modern critic, I find a reference to 'The New Criticism' by which he says 'I mean not only the American critics, but the whole critical movement that derives from T. S. Eliot'. I do not understand why the author should isolate me so sharply from the American Critics, but on the other hand I fail to see any

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8 Lucy Sean—*Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 65

9 Eliot, T. S.—*OPP*, p. 106



critical movement which can be said, to derive from myself, though I hope that as an editor I gave the New Criticism, or some of it, encouragement and exercise ground in *The Criterion*”<sup>10</sup>

In the same essay, Eliot sounds a note of caution against indiscriminate use of the term “New Criticism” and the implications arising thereof:—

“A great deal has happened in literary criticism since this influential book—I A Richards’ *Principles of Literary Criticism* 1925—came out, and my paper—*The Functions of Criticism*, 1923,—was written two years earlier. Criticism has developed and branched out in several directions. The term “The New Criticism” is often employed by people without realising what a variety it comprehends, but its currency does, I think, recognise the fact that the more distinguished critics of today, however widely they differ from each other, all differ in some significant way from the critics of a previous generation”<sup>11</sup>

The quoted extracts form part of “**The Frontiers of Criticism**”, which was published in 1956. The very fact that the reflections on the terminology and the nature of “New Criticism” have been made by no less a person than Eliot himself, gives them an air of extraordinary relevance. Taken together, both the extracts throw some valuable light on how far Eliot has been responsible in popularising the mode of New Criticism. They also reveal something basic about the New Critics. They differ with each other yet have something common against the critics of Victorian and Georgian generations.

The origin of “New Criticism” may be said to date with the first decade of the century. In 1910, in his famous address, at Columbia University, Joel Spingarn was the first to use the term “New Criticism.”<sup>12</sup> He started a serious dialogue on two important points: first, he rejected the hitherto practice of classifying literature into periods and groups; second, relying on the aesthetics of Croce, he demanded that each individual work of art be regarded in **itself**. The points then raised by Spingarn, developed later into a sort of controversy between the **Impressionistic** school of criticism and that of the **Formalists** in the thirties. But, it also made positive contribu-

10. OPP, p 106

11. *Ibid*, p 104

12. Scott Wilbur S —*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, p 18.

tion to the contemporary setting of literary criticism of the Continent. Scott observes.—

“Atleast in dismissing the professional tendency to categorise and to seek the moral significance of literature, Spingarn helped create an atmosphere congenial to artistic and critical experiment”<sup>13</sup>

The early beginnings of The New Criticism were made in England in the late twenties. The regular and formal examples of the first neo-critical analysis were furnished by Robert Graves and the American poetess Laura Riding, in their joint and “word-by-word collaborated” work: **“A Survey of Modernist Poetry.”** In its own way, the book is full of original flashes of the critics and contains a cogent defence of post 1918 poetry. The authors adhere to the verbal and structural analysis of a poem. They stress on what they call the characteristic search for “the most difficult meaning.” Later on, William Empson contributed notably towards the popular rise of the new school of verbal analysis, suffixing to it, the study of two additional aspects—psychological and semantic. The New Criticism spread to the United States in the late thirties and made great headway under the powerful patronage of such scholars as Kenneth Burke and John Crowe Ransom. The others, who also join the coterie of the new critics, are Richard Blackmur, Ronald Crane and Mortimer Adler. They may be called the Neo-Aristotelians, showing a very keen interest in language and its uses.

The position of I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis needs separate mention. Although, the two critics have closely associated themselves with the school of New Criticism, yet each of them retains the individuality of his own particular view-point. It would be advisable to remove, at this stage, one current misgiving about Prof. Richards. He is supposed to have pioneered a School of Neo-criticism, of which, Eliot also is considered to be one of the members. “The dates alone”, says Watson, “forbid such a notion: Eliot is the older man by five years; and his first and the best critical work, **The Sacred**

Wood appeared before Richards had published at all<sup>14</sup> Equally mistaken would it be to construe, that Eliot prologued in one way or the other, what I. A. Richards published in *The Principles of Criticism*, in 1925 The latter has his own independent achievement as an aesthete, which could have been made as readily, even if, "Eliot had never existed"<sup>15</sup> He is the pioneer of Anglo-American New Criticism of the thirties and forties Richards provides a "ramshackle aesthetic"<sup>16</sup> to build upon and the examples of a criticism that is "practical rather than pedantically historicist"<sup>17</sup> As a theorist, it is Richards, who colours the new technique of Verbal and Structural analysis, with a sound philosophy based on psychology and semantics.

F. R. Leavis is certainly a new critic, but with a difference His criticism has an unquestionable imprint of contemporaneity. In one sense, Leavis may be said to be a genuine disciple of his twin masters—T S Eliot and I A Richards In his passionate defence of "Values" he is perhaps more Eliotian than Eliot himself, while his adherence to the analytical techniques of practical criticism bring him closer to Prof Richards There are some who have regarded him as the British counterpart to the American New Criticism.<sup>18</sup> Leavis' position in some respect is analogous to that of Yvor Winters Both of them "express the traditional concern for the moral ends of literature"<sup>19</sup>

Before discussing Eliot's actual contribution to the New Criticism it appears necessary that a synoptic summary of its salient features be taken up The cult of "New Criticism" has a variety of meanings. It includes, the Neo-Humanists; the Moralists; the Formalists; the Analysts; and the Neo-classicists. It culminates into a mighty movement because of many factors—negative as well as positive—inherent in contempor-

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14 Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p 196

15 *Ibid*

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid*, p 202

18 *Ibid*, p 208

19 Scott, Wilbur S.—*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism.*

ary criticism. On its negative side, the movement is "reactionary", displaying a general contempt for the late nineteenth century values in art and literature. On its positive side, it introduces a new method and a new outlook. The adjective "new" however should not be construed strictly in the literal sense. It has always held for it, an air of "pleasing paradox".<sup>20</sup> Whatever tenets the new critics have prescribed are not new altogether. Nevertheless, in its totality, the New Criticism aims at a technique and a doctrine, which are basically original. Its underlying tenets are —

(i) In the first instance, the work of art must be evaluated by itself; and as such, the social, moral and historical considerations should, in no case, be allowed to blur evaluation. These considerations may explain the circumstances or the motive behind the composition, but in no way, constitute the work itself. It is in this context that the new critics denounce historical and biographical criticism of the nineteenth century.

(ii) Second, the composition has an individual existence of its own or what Eliot phrases "something existing between the poet and his readers". "The evaluation or the judgment" argue the new critics "must concentrate itself on nothing but this fundamental reality".

(iii) Third, in New Criticism, the psychological aspect is always given a primary place in the process of creation. Its protagonists believe, that art itself implies transformation of particular states of mind of the artist. Hence, psychology being the main architect in the phenomenon of poetic creation, the critic also must attach due importance to psychology while evaluating a work of art.

(iv) Fourth, the new critics feel that the search for what Graves calls the "most difficult meaning" is the pre-requisite of objective assessment. They subscribe to the seminal doctrine that difficulty is the chief among the poetic virtues, and furthermore, it is always the most difficult meaning that is the most significant.

(v) Fifth, the new critic lays greater emphasis on un-

travelling the ingredients of ambiguity and thus recommends a detailed study of the medium of communication. They suggest that the language should be analysed word for word and the meaning, rhythm, music, syntax, imagery, symbols and abstract nuances must be scanned properly to arrive at correct conclusions

(vi) Sixth, in addition to the verbal analysis, the exponents of New Criticism are pre-occupied with the structural analysis of a poem. They feel, that in order to determine its internal growth, its inter-relation with the various parts; structure and form has to be closely analysed.

(vii) Lastly, the critics of the new school aim at the organic unity of the whole poem. As such, their stress on structure is, in fact, a stress on the determination of its total pattern. This pattern, according to them, has to correspond to a successful communication of the whole experience and not merely any part of it. It means that a poem must be one organic piece in as far as its total structure, experience, thought and emotions are concerned.

The method followed generally by the critics of the new school is the method of analysis—structural, verbal, symbolic and psychological. The structure of a poem with the neo-critics is not confined to its form only. It includes both content and form. It is in this spirit that Austin Warren and Rene Wellek refer to structure as “dynamic”<sup>21</sup>. Justifying the emphasis of the new technique on structure O’Faolain has remarked:—

“Men would turn to the poetry of exact expression of controlled sensibility, of limited but clear aims of a strict spiritual and emotional discipline and then set out to create a critical structure to define these reforms. This structure was the New Criticism”<sup>22</sup>

The inference drawn by the learned critic is hypothetical. It establishes an intimate relation between the creative urge, on the one hand, and the critical necessity, on the other. The

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21. Warren and Wellek—*Theory of Literature*.

22. Quoted in *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, p. 19.

same hypothesis, if applied to the literary scene of twenties, appears to be perfectly valid. The New Criticism may be said to have corresponded to the pattern of the New Poetry, introducing which, Edwin Marsh has said:—

“This Volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty”—

The strength and beauty mentioned by Marsh is the same what O’Faolain has suggested “the exact expression, controlled sensibility and disciplined emotions.” It implies a change from the sheer emotionalism of the late nineteenth century poets to the exact, dry and hard poetry of the early twenties of the new century. Under the force of the changing literary patterns, critical values also undergo a process of new orientation giving rise to the development of a new movement in literary criticism

We have already quoted at length the views of Eliot vis-a-vis the New Criticism. He stands rather loosely to the movement, part pioneer, part sceptic.<sup>24</sup> It would be incorrect to say that Eliot invents the new critical technique, which broadly speaking, is the product of an intellectual climate, wherein not one but many have their due shares. But let there be no doubt, that in criticism as in poetry, he is really the first “to give expression to the spirit of his time.”<sup>25</sup> More than this, he provides a striking example to others by virtue of the power and penetration of his work. Commenting on the nature of Eliot’s critical ideals, Sean Lucy has some valuable observations to make.—

“Eliot’s ideal criticism would be absolutely objective. This is clearly impracticable, as he admitted himself very early in the days but it remained the ideal of the new criticism. It was closely bound up with the idea of “the extinction of personality in poetry, and like this idea, was part of the expression of longing for a pure unemotional art of clean lines, in direct reaction to the decayed romantic emotionalism of the Georgians”<sup>26</sup>

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23 *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, p. 19 (Quoted)

24 Watson George—*The Literary Critics*, p. 202

25 Lucy Sean—*The Idea of Tradition*, p. 67.

26 *Ibid.*

The formal position of Eliot's criticism may be screened mainly through the three theories he has propounded **The Theory of Impersonality; The Theory of Tradition and The Theory of Value.** In the first two, he throws his weight in favour of "tradition and order", restricting thus, the current tendency of romantic emotionalism in art. In the Theory of Value, he explains the creative process and lays down the criteria of "analysis and interpretation" for its objective elucidation. All the three theories add new dimensions to the contemporary vogue of literary criticism. They open new vistas. They reject the old modes and recommend the fresh ones. In asking critics to imbibe "the historical sense", Eliot discards the practice of biographical and historical criticism. In recommending "analysis and interpretation", as method of critical evaluation, he helps in popularising the technique of verbal analysis, which by the thirties is an article of faith with the new critics. In characterising a poem, as existing between the writer and the reader, Eliot provides to art an individuality that becomes the abiding creed of the New Criticism. But the key, to the assessment of Eliot's impact on contemporary criticism, finally lies in what may be summed up, as the principle of organic creation of art. He believes that the phenomenon of poetic creation involves a process of synthesis among feelings, sensations, emotions and thoughts, culminating into the totality of the artist's experience. Secondly, consequent upon this experience the organism of a poem should always exhibit harmony of its "inner perspective." Thirdly, its communication should be so processed as to result in a kind of synthesis of the appropriate idiom, rhythm and music of verse. This, in one sense, amounts to the same view, what Eliot calls "the Auditory Imagination" and what I. A. Richards has qualified as the "emotive use of language." Eliot's final position has been summed up by Vincent Buckley.—

"What set him against Arnold is what set him against the Romantic century—the nineteenth. His total position is one of reaction against that century and an affirmation of a scheme of values to it."<sup>27</sup>

And the values Eliot affirms have done their job magnificently, the sham in the artist has been exposed, the dry hard verse in poetry has come to stay: the technique of new criticism has stirred imagination, the taste of the reading public—may be the elite only—has been regulated, and finally a variety of interests—moral, psychological and social—have been brought to bear upon the principle of literary criticism

F. R. Leavis has adjudged the contemporary impact of Eliot from a different angle.—

"It is not for nothing that Mr. Eliot's criticism has been directed mainly upon the 17th century. One might say that the effect of his criticism and poetry together has been to establish the 17th century in its due place in the English tradition."<sup>28</sup>

M. C. Bradbrook interprets the influence of Eliot's criticism in terms of taste rather than in anything else —

"The influence of Mr. Eliot as a critic must surely be noted rather in the history of taste than in the history of ideas."<sup>29</sup>

But Sean Lucy elaborates the same point, more rationally.—

"In the realm of critical ideas Eliot's influence has been just as considerable as in the development of taste. His conception of true literary tradition (or perhaps a simplified form of this idea) is now, common currency as also are "pure criticism", comparison and analysis, the sensual experience of thought, the objective correlative, the fact that poetry should share the virtues of good prose, the necessity of discipline for good writing of any sort and many more ideas. They are not Eliot's inventions but his influence in making them part of literary tradition in our day has been both seminal and formative."<sup>30</sup>

T. S. Eliot may rightly be regarded as representing a new "Literary Renaissance." True, that he does not appeal either as poet or as critic to any "great public."<sup>31</sup> But the fact is, when Eliot makes his debut in the early twenties, the "great public", still, suffered from moral and intellectual paralysis. It was

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28. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 199

29. Bradbrook, M. C.—*Focus Three*, p. 119, quoted by Sean Lucy

30. Lucy Sean—*Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 69

31. *Ibid.*, p. 70.



in a typical state of confusion. Nevertheless, Eliot does not write for this class. In fact, it is the minority, or what he himself calls the elite he cares to write for. As regards, what he has to say, he feels that the only jury of judgment is that of the "ablest poetical practitioners of his own time."<sup>32</sup> The difficulty is, that he demands prompt efforts and cooperation from his readers. Once given, Eliot is sure to delight, and possibly to broaden the horizons of one's understanding. English poetry of today and of tomorrow, is likely to have the same kind of relationship with him as the poetry of the later Romantics has had with Wordsworth and Coleridge."<sup>33</sup>

Discussing Arnold in *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, Eliot has made a significant point, which may serve as key to the assessment of his own criticism and its various achievements. He says—

"From time to time, every hundred years or so, it is desirable that some critic shall appear to review the past of our literature and set the poets and the poems in order."<sup>34</sup>

The task of the critic, as envisaged in the statement, is very difficult. Such critics are rare, because in addition to an exceptional scholarship, it requires an unfettered mind, who can gear up enough power for interpretation, appreciation, and if need be imposition also. The whole of Eliot's literary career bears testimony to his being an exceptional critic of this category. It is now a matter of common knowledge that Eliot's single-minded devotion to literature with a view to re-interpreting its own values, has brought the old pattern of poets and poems under the spell of an evolutionary process. This evolution and the success it has achieved during its operation of 40 years or so, can be felt in the body of literary opinion and taste which it has cultivated in society. Without his exciting stewardship we might have been the poorer; for much that "we take for granted in our knowledge and enjoyment of the literature which satisfies our particular needs."<sup>35</sup> In this

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32 Eliot, T S—O.P.P., p. 157.

33 Leavis, F R—*New Bearings in English Poetry*.

34 Eliot, T. S—U.P.U.C., p. 108

35 *Selected Prose*, Introduction, p. 7

respect, his re-assessment of the Elizabethan dramatists; his rehabilitation of the Metaphysical poets; his judgments on Hamlet and Arnold, and his appraisal of Laforgue, Hulme and Baudelaire, have left considerable influence on the sensibility of the elite. John Hayward, the editor of the *Selected Prose*, rightly observes.—

“Evidence of his imposing influence as a critic is perhaps most apparent in our appreciation of his own work as a poet and dramatist, for much of the satisfaction we derive from it is due to those very elements in the literature of the past which he has revalued, for his own profit as well as ours. It is indeed through knowledge of his criticism that we may often arrive at a clearer and deeper understanding of his poems and plays”<sup>36</sup>

He continues:—

“I cannot indeed think of a critic who has ever been more widely read and discussed in his own lifetime, and not only in English but in almost every language except Russian, throughout the civilized world”<sup>37</sup>

Let there be no doubt in acknowledging the fact that Eliot has given to the literary world a critical *oeuvre*, which enforces a slowly changing conception not only of the “value of poetry but also of poetic values.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, there is a dialect of artistic development which has got its due acknowledgement in literary circles. Eliot is one of its prophets.<sup>39</sup> It is but for him that Ezra Pound, Hulme and Baudelaire are popularly discussed in literary circles, as having “the significance he attributed to them.”<sup>40</sup> The influence Eliot has been able to cast upon contemporary literary scene shows that he was not a “mere individual in isolation”<sup>41</sup> One specific quality, which distinguishes him from his contemporaries, is that his writings—creative and critical—embody the general plight and consciousness of the age more than anybody’s else

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36 *Selected Prose*, Introduction, p. 7

37. *Ibid*, p 10

38 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p 89

39 Lucy Sean—*Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 89

40 Leavis, F R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*

41 *Ibid*.

He could do this more effectively in that he was a critic as well as a poet.<sup>42</sup>

Looking at the nature of Eliot's criticism is like listening to a rather "dry-voiced lecture,"<sup>43</sup> to which one has to get used. His whole effort, though spreading over to a full span of more than four decades, and comprising not less than five hundred pieces of prose criticism, is bound together into "one whole work"<sup>44</sup> by an innate pressure of a specific outlook. What, at first sight, gives an impression of heterogeneous mass of "very varied length,"<sup>45</sup> on deeper examination, proves to be one synthetic growth. From the very start of his career as a critic, Eliot is seen trying hard to reconstruct a new place for the critic in modern society. His efforts have added a few more dimensions to the status of a literary critic.

Eliot has classified critics into six types<sup>46</sup>. They are, the Professional Critic,<sup>47</sup> the Critic with Gusto;<sup>48</sup> the Academic and Theoretical Critic,<sup>49</sup> the Critic "whose criticism may be said to be a by-product of his creative activity",<sup>50</sup> the critic as Moralist and the Special Critic. The critics of first category—the professional—are those writers whose literary criticism is their chief and perhaps their only title to fame. They may be called—the "Super-Reviewers"<sup>51</sup> for some magazine or newspaper. Eliot includes in this type such critics as Sainte-Beuve, Paul Elmer More, Desmond MacCarthy and Edmund Gosse. He even goes to the extent of declaring that "the Professional Critic may be, as Sainte-Beuve certainly was, a failed creative writer."<sup>52</sup>

42. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*

43. Sean Lucy—*Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 63

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 11

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

52. *Ibid.*

The second type—the Critic with Gusto—is not called to the seat of judgment. He is rather the advocate of the authors he brings to light. They may be those authors who are sometimes forgotten or unduly neglected and ignored. The Critic with Gusto endeavours to focus our attention on such writers and makes us see merits and charms, where formerly, the same have not been found. According to Eliot, George Saintsbury and Quiller-Couch are the critics belonging to this class.<sup>53</sup>

The third type consists of the Academic and the Theoretical critics. They have been grouped together because Eliot feels that they range from the purely scholarly to the philosophical critics. It includes such names as W. P. Ker, I. A. Richards and William Empson. Dr. F. R. Leavis has been called the Critic as Moralist. The last category comprises those critics who are also tenants of an academic post and are likely to have made a special study of one period or one author.<sup>54</sup>

Eliot's ideal critic is the one whose criticism is the by-product of his creative activity. He prescribes three conditions for the entrance into this category: first, the candidate is known primarily for his poetry,<sup>55</sup> second, his criticism is distinguished<sup>56</sup> for its own sake, and third, it should not be merely such as to "throw light upon its author's verse."<sup>57</sup> Eliot mentions Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, Racine and Dryden under this type. The name of Matthew Arnold is also included in the list but with reservations.<sup>58</sup> "It is into this company", Eliot suggests, "that I must shyly intrude."<sup>59</sup> The other types of critics which Eliot has mentioned in his stray reference are—the Technical Critic; the Historical Critic; the Philosophical Critic; and the Exhaustive Critic. The technical critic according to him is the one who writes to expound

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53. *To Criticise the Critic*, p. 13

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

some novelty or impart some lesson to practitioners of an art"<sup>60</sup> He can be called a critic only in a narrow sense. "The historical and the philosophical critics" says Eliot "had better be called historians and philosophers quite simply"<sup>61</sup> The exhaustive critic is the one who is able to "sweep the distance and gain an acquaintance with minute objects,"<sup>62</sup> with a view to comparing "minute objects" close at hand In the essay, **The Perfect Critic**, Eliot has referred to an additional category of critics, viz, the Important Critic. He comments:—

"‘An important critic’ is the person who is absorbed in the present problems of art and who wishes to bring the Forces of the past to bear on these problems."<sup>63</sup>

As to the functions of criticism, Eliot's notions appear to be very much diffused. But given a deeper thought, there appears again a sense of underlying uniformity, right through his first essay—**The Functions of Criticism**, to the last one—**The Frontiers of Criticism**. Eliot's position, on the subject, is characteristically different to that of any other critic, coming before him The functions he assigns to a major critic are fairly multifarious. First, the critic is to discover the nature of poetry as a branch of aesthetics. He is to probe into such fundamental question as to "what is poetry?"; or "how is it written?"<sup>64</sup> Second, he is expected to discriminate between "the living and the dead in literature."<sup>65</sup> Third, the critic must preserve tradition where a good tradition exists.<sup>66</sup> Fourth, he is to elucidate works of art and correct taste.<sup>67</sup> Fifth, he should promote understanding and enjoyment of literature.<sup>68</sup> Sixth, he must involve himself in the study of literature of the past and thus bring out models and standards

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60 Eliot, T S—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 12.

61 *Ibid*, p. 16.

62 Eliot, T. S—UPUC, p. 108

63 Eliot, T. S—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 38

64 Eliot, T S—UPUC, Introduction, p. 20

65 Eliot, T S—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 47

66 *Ibid*, Introduction, xv

67. *Selected Prose*, p. 18

68. Eliot, T. S—OPP, p. 115

to bear on Art of the present.<sup>69</sup> Lastly, the critic is to build up the organic concept of literature to see it steadily and whole.<sup>70</sup>

Hence, the Eliotian critic is the repository of various literary interests. He is the preserver of tradition; the elucidator of art; the corrector of taste; the architect of poetic values, the regulator of a new order, and the exposé or the destroyer of the sham in art. In this way, we come to assume that for Eliot the critic is the guardian of literary values. It is his primary duty to synthesize the past, the present and the future in literature. He must see its past in terms of its present; he must see its present in terms of its past; and must help its real development in the future by bringing his total knowledge of the past in finding out solution to the present problem of Art and Literature.<sup>71</sup>

What Eliot aspires for is the provision of a proper literary environment which in his plan is "very largely an affair of the critic."<sup>72</sup> Unless this is achieved, it is hardly possible to achieve anything else. The creative writer and the man of letters have also to collaborate in achieving this ideal. Hence, a genuine critic should have the necessary requisites. He must possess, what speaking of Mr. Whibley Eliot has prescribed as the first essential of a perfect critic, the quality of showing interest in his subject and the ability to communicate an interest in it.<sup>73</sup> Besides this, he should imbibe what Eliot calls the "historical sense."<sup>74</sup> He should have the capacity and temperament to handle with care "the tools of comparison and analysis."<sup>75</sup> In order to justify his existence, he should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks.<sup>76</sup> Not

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69 Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood, Tradition and Individual Talent*, p. 47

70 *Ibid*

71 Lucy Sean—*Eliot and The Idea of Tradition*, p. 21.

72. *Ibid*, p. 17

73 Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 37

74 *Selected Prose*.

75 *Ibid*, p. 19.

76 *Ibid*, p. 18

only this, Eliot even goes to the extreme to suggest that the critic in question should compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible.<sup>77</sup> It means that the critic should not suffer from the defects either of feeling or of intellect; and must display what Eliot qualifies as the "dissociative faculty."<sup>78</sup> This is necessary because according to him "the critic needs to be able not only to saturate himself in the spirit and the fashion of a time—the local flavour—but also to separate himself suddenly from it in appreciation of the highest creative works."<sup>79</sup> Thus, Eliot conceives criticism as an orderly field of "beneficent activity,"<sup>80</sup> and considers it a place for "quiet cooperative labour."<sup>81</sup> Its chief aim is the common pursuit of "true judgement"<sup>82</sup>—judgement which in its totality ought to be impersonal and objective. He makes a solemn declaration.—

"Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry."<sup>83</sup>

which in its ultimate analysis becomes an article of faith with the New Critics

It has already been pointed out that in his post-Christian decade, i.e., the thirties, Eliot's literary criticism is specifically marked by an unprecedented emphasis on social and religious concern. It ceases to be purely literary and becomes bracketed with religious and moral judgments. Since then, he has been persistently justifying his zeal for moral values. He has stated in *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, that pure artistic appreciation is "only an ideal."<sup>84</sup> He repeats the same point in "*To Criticise the Critic*", when he asserts, it is impossible to fence off literary criticism from criticism "on other grounds."<sup>85</sup> Eliot's contention is that in order to under-

77 S.P., p. 18

78 Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 37

79 *Ibid*

80 *Selected Prose*, p. 18.

81 *Ibid*

82 *Ibid*

83. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 53

84 Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 109

85. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 25

stand great art, one must enter into all other interests of the artist.<sup>86</sup> He asserts:—

“Literary criticism is an activity which must constantly define its own boundaries, also must constantly be going beyond them”<sup>87</sup>

He continues:—

“We cannot get very far with Dante, or Shakespeare, or Goethe, without touching upon theology, and philosophy and ethics and politics”<sup>88</sup>

In the *Frontiers of Criticism*, he elaborates the same point.—

“The difference, then, between the literary critic, and the critic who has passed beyond the frontier of literary criticism, is not that the literary critic is “purely” literary or that he has no other interests. A critic who was interested in nothing but ‘literature’ would have very little to say to us, for his literature would be a pure abstraction. Poets have their interests besides poetry—otherwise their poetry would be very empty: they are poets because their dominant interest has been in turning their experience and their thought (and to experience and to think means to have interests beyond poetry)—in turning their experience and then thinking into poetry. The critic accordingly is a *literary* critic if his primary interest, in writing criticism, is to help his readers to *understand and enjoy*. But he must have other interests, just as much as the poet himself, for the literary critic is not merely a technical expert, who has learned the rules to be observed by the writers he criticises: the critic must be the whole man, a man with convictions and principles and of knowledge and experience of life”<sup>89</sup>

The extract is very significant in as far as it explains an important aspect of Eliot’s literary criticism. He is not prepared to recognise his critic as purely literary—a man in isolation. An Eliotian critic, on the other hand, is the “whole man”—a man with convictions and principles, and of knowledge and experience of life. Like the poet, the critic also must be a man of varied interests—interests which shall bear upon his criticism. Eliot feels that only the whole man would

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86 Eliot, T S—OPP, p 215

87 *Ibid*

88 *Ibid*

89 *Ibid*, p 116.



be the most appropriately equipped for helping the readers in what he maintains "understanding and enjoyment" as the essential function of criticism<sup>90</sup> Eliot is prepared to express his gratitude to this type of critic because he has the capacity to "make him look at something he has never looked at before"<sup>91</sup>

Eliot has qualified his critic as a man of convictions and principles which raises an important issue, the issue of poetry and belief. It brings us back to one of his most controversial essays "**Religion and Literature**" wherein he has asserted that "literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint."<sup>92</sup> Suffice it to say that in 1923, Eliot has defined the functions of criticism as "the elucidation of art and the correction of taste." The "function" used in this specific context, implies "social utility." The actual process of criticism, then, may be inferred as "more-or-less" formal guidance of the reader to the "kind and quality of life embodied in a poem or novel."<sup>93</sup> It tends to be a matter of social and communal concern. Perhaps, Leavis is right in his oft-repeated emphasis that the "definition is so phrased as to elicit agreement, modification or enlightened dissent."<sup>94</sup> Whatever the case may be, even stray references such as these, to an ethical and theological standpoint are fraught with serious misgivings. After the publication of the essay, "**Religion and Literature**", even Eliot's admirers have questioned the validity of this approach. His religious leanings have been hotly debated in literary reviews and periodicals. But Eliot has not yielded ground. In the **Notes on the Christian Society**, and **The Definition of Culture**, Eliot has re-iterated the same point of view. In 1961, he asserts once again:—

"That literary merit can be estimated in complete isolation, is the illusion of those who believe that literary merit alone can justify the publication of a book which could otherwise be condemned on moral grounds."<sup>95</sup>

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90 O P P, p. 115

91. *Ibid.*, p. 117

92 Eliot T S—*Selected Essays*, p. 388

93 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 215.

94 *Ibid.*

95. Eliot, T S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 26

Observed closely, the nature of these assertions becomes clear. He envisages not one but two operations of the critical faculty<sup>96</sup> The extracts quoted above contain an explanatory qualification which may provide a clue to the problem whether or not any ethical and theological standards are relevant to literary judgment? In the first extract from "**Religion and Literature**", his stress is on "completing" literary criticism with ethics and theology In the second, the emphasis, though expressed negatively, remains the same. complete isolation in literary estimate is not possible. The rhetoric in both the uses is cleverly worded. It implies that Eliot himself appears to be more than conscious of the probable complications which these assertions are likely to arouse. Hence, in the first stage of the critical operation, he conceives of literary criticism as "purely literary", while in the second, he aims at a supplementary **forward** point, suggesting a kind of criticism which may be called "socio-religious."<sup>97</sup> But the ambiguity does not lie in any sort of theoretical assertion. It arises out of its practical implications Speaking theoretically there is no harm if literary criticism is completed by some ethical standpoint The trouble is only on the practical plane It arises when Eliot tries to substitute theological considerations for the literary rather than completing the one with the other.

In our discussion of Eliot's classification of critics, we have already pointed out that his ideal critic is the poet whose criticism is the by-product of his creative activity.<sup>98</sup> He is the critic who is particularly a poet. Eliot's whole critical attitude here reveals the close observance of a solemn principle, which he himself has explained in **The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism**:—

"The critical mind operating in poetry may always be in advance to the critical mind operating upon poetry"<sup>99</sup>

Which means that the creative and the critical faculties are to work together in unison to produce the best possible

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96 Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p 217

97 *Ibid.*, p 218

98 Eliot, T S—*To Criticise the Critic*, p 13

99 Eliot, T S—*UPUC*, p 30

results. They present merely the two directions of the same sensibility and are complementary to each other. Hence, the critic and the creative artist should frequently be the "same person."<sup>100</sup> This type of workshop criticism has its own merits and demerits. It is meritorious because it is indicative of the thinking process that goes into the formation of the poet's own verse.<sup>101</sup> It has also the advantage of being appreciated in relation to the poetry he has written.<sup>102</sup> But it has its serious limitations also. First, what is anti-pathetic to the poet, is "outside of his competence."<sup>103</sup> Second, the judgment of this critic may be unsound outside of his own art.<sup>104</sup>

By virtue of his promise and performance, Eliot "intrudes shyly into the company of his ideal critics."<sup>105</sup> His equipment as a critic is congruent with his equipment as a poet.<sup>106</sup> His early criticism is analogous to that of Ezra Pound;<sup>107</sup> like Pound, Eliot also directs his energies in the exploration of a suitable pattern of structure and language. Eliot's immediate object was to restore stability and fertility to the words. He is after the formation of a new structure or a verbal technique of poetry, expressive of a precise way of "thinking and feeling."<sup>108</sup> It is this "personal search",<sup>109</sup> as he himself refers to, that inspires him to study Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists. It is with the same view that Eliot looks forward to the poetry of Laforgue, Ezra Pound, and other French symbolists. If he turns to the poetry of Donne and other metaphysicals, it is also with the same mission: to reconstruct a living form of poetry out of the "dust-bowl of modern speech."<sup>110</sup>

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100. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*.

101. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P., p. 106.

102. *Ibid*, p. 107.

103. *Ibid*, p. 108.

104. *Ibid*.

105. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 13.

106. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 126.

107. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P., pp. 106-107.

108. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 63.

109. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P., p. 106.

110. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 127.

It would be admirable to mention that the exploratory interest which Eliot evinces in the local effects of the language, is the key to his earlier criticism. The fact, that he continues working on the special qualities of rhyme and rhythm, in the colloquial speech, enhances further its intrinsic value. It is through **The Waste Land** that Eliot promises a new start for English poetry.<sup>111</sup> **The Essay on Dante**<sup>112</sup> establishes his reputation in balancing together the twin interests of structure and language. Finally, passing through the concept of "Auditory Imagination"<sup>113</sup> his achievements in linguistic effects touch their virtual climax in **The Music of Poetry**,<sup>114</sup> published in 1942. To put it briefly, both structure and vocabulary had come to Eliot with all their richness and variety. He was able to evoke new patterns of feelings, new modes of experience and new techniques of modern sensibility. Let us acknowledge that if present-day practitioners are now using words very differently as compared to poets of the last age, it is mainly due to him.<sup>115</sup>

Before closing our discussion on the status and function of the Eliotian critic, it is necessary to clarify, what Eliot exactly means by "correction of taste."<sup>116</sup> It is in the essay **The Functions of Criticism** that he refers, for the first time, to this term. In the essays in **Poetry and Poets**, he further elaborates it and comes to consider the question: how far can the critic alter public taste for one or another poet or one or another period of literature of the past.<sup>117</sup> In this respect, the stray references occurring at various places, in "**The Essays**",<sup>118</sup> are more than enough to provide the clues, to his understanding of the subject. Eliot's basic position is: that distinction

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111. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 95.

112. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*.

113. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C.

114. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P., p. 26.

115. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 71.

116. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*.

117. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 21.

118. *The Essays—Ancient and Modern*.

must be drawn between taste and fashion;<sup>119</sup> that fashion—the love of change for its own sake—is very transient;<sup>120</sup> that taste springs from a deeper source;<sup>121</sup> that it is either innate or inculcated;<sup>122</sup> that it is inextricable from the development of character and personality;<sup>123</sup> that the critic however cannot create taste;<sup>124</sup> that one's taste in poetry cannot be isolated from one's other interests and passions;<sup>125</sup> that it affects them and is affected by them; and must be limited as one's self is limited;<sup>126</sup> and finally, that the critic's own tastes and views alter in the course of his life time.<sup>127</sup>

Eliot's contention is that the changes in the tastes and views of critics may be the results of either of the two reasons: greater maturity and earlier decay.<sup>128</sup> He concedes, as in his own case, that the "degree of excitement and sense of enlargement",<sup>129</sup> which one experiences in his formative period, may not come afterwards. In the course of time, because of such changes, the critic would likely turn to other authors than those, offering him pure delight in the earlier stages. Eliot cites his own example:—

"I turn more often the pages of Mallarme than those of Lafor-  
gue, those of George Herbert than those of Donne, of Shakes-  
peare than of his contemporaries."<sup>130</sup>

But this should not be taken to suggest a "judgement of relative greatness."<sup>131</sup> It is quite natural that what best responds to the adolescent needs would be different to the needs

119. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 21.

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*

122. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., Introduction.

123. *Ibid.*

124. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*.

125. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C.

126. *Ibid.*

127. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 22.

128. *Ibid.*

129. *Ibid.*

130. *Ibid.*

131. *Ibid.*

of the middle and later periods of a critic's life. In the case of Eliot, it is also worthwhile to note the impact of an additional factor: that his own taste had become affected by the exploratory nature of his early criticism. It is on this score that he explains away<sup>132</sup> "the much talked of reticence"<sup>133</sup> in his views on Milton. He refutes the charge that it was "a recantation of the earlier opinion",<sup>134</sup> and upholds it as a development in view of the fact, that there was no longer any likelihood of his "being imitated."<sup>135</sup>

As to the current queries of how far Eliot has been responsible for first discovering and then starting the vogue of "the early dramatists and the metaphysical poets",<sup>136</sup> he categorically replies "hardly at all—as a critic."<sup>137</sup> But as a poet, he is prepared to share the credit:—

"As the taste for my own poetry spread, so did the taste for the poets to whom I owed the greatest debt and about whom I had written."<sup>138</sup>

The reason he spells out for the popularisation of this taste is more meaningful than the acknowledgment itself; "their poetry and mine were congenial to that age."<sup>139</sup> He re-iterates:—

"It is one function of the critic to assist the literate public of his day to recognise its affinity with one poet or with one type of poetry, or one age of poetry rather than with another."<sup>140</sup>

— We may be allowed to sum up our assessment of Eliot's contemporary influence with an important generalization made by M. C. Bradbrook:—

"However the arbitrament of general principles may uphold

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132. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 24.

133. Watson, George—*The Literary Critics*.

134. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 24.

135. *Ibid.*

136. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

137. *Ibid.*

138. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

139. *Ibid.*

140. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the dignity of letters, it is by the example of his practice that a critic educates his public."<sup>141</sup>

Eliot's own example, more than anything else, substantiates forcefully the maxim expressed, herein. He has become a public institution.<sup>142</sup> By example of his own practice, Eliot has certainly created as well as educated his public. The immediate history of the literary taste is enough to record his astounding achievement. But more than that is what he has "enabled his generation to achieve for itself."<sup>143</sup>

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141. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 119.

142. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 177.

143. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 119.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

Eliot's theoretical speculations are widely interspersed in his essays, lectures and broadcasts. Apart from **Tradition and The Individual Talent**; the most significant specimens of his sustained thinking are the essays on **The Metaphysical Poets**; **Religion and Literature**; **Hamlet**; **Baudelaire**; **Arnold**; **Milton**; **Yeats**; **The Music of Poetry** and **What Dante Means to Me**. They contain some of his finest critical reflections. **The Functions of Criticism**; **The Frontiers of Criticism**; and **To Criticise the Critic** incorporate elaborate statements, as to the nature of the vicarious responsibility the critic is entrusted with. The two essays, appearing in **The Sacred Wood: The Perfect Critic** and **The Imperfect Critic** are more negative than positive in their tone, and that, perhaps, explains for their deletion in **The Selected Essays**, published in 1932. **The Possibilities of Poetic Drama**; **The Three Voices of Poetry**; and **Poetry and Drama** embody his views on the probable revival of the verse drama in English. As regards to Eliot's social criticism, besides **The Use of Poetry** and **The Use of Criticism**, the twin treatises: **The Idea of a Christian Society**; and **Notes Towards the Definition of Culture** are the more authoritative. The first four lectures, published in **On Poetry and Poets**, take their place beside **Tradition and The Individual Talent**. "They are", says C. L. Barber, "the master-pieces of balanced generalisation about the literary process."<sup>1</sup>

In our chapter-wise discussion, we have already studied the different aspects of Eliot's criticism with all its theoretical and practical bearings. He has left behind an established legacy of certain well acknowledged principles of literary critic-

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1. Matthiesen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*. (Quoted).



ism. His three theories: **Theory of Tradition**; **Theory of Poetry**; and **Theory of Impersonality** have gained universal recognition. His four phrases: **Dissociation of Sensibility**; **Objective Correlative**; **Auditory Imagination**; and **Sensuous Apprehension of Thought** have been widely debated. His pleas for the revival of poetic drama and the strenuous endeavours made by him in that direction have earned considerable applause in literary circles. It is no less an achievement that Eliot has been successful in "establishing the 17th century in its due place in the English tradition."<sup>2</sup> Again, it goes to his credit that he could construct a living form of poetry out of the "dust bowl of the colloquial speech."<sup>3</sup> As to Eliot's critical *oeuvre*, one can safely assert that it has enforced a new conception, not only of the "value of poetry, but also of poetic values."<sup>4</sup> The assessment of Mario Praz is highly substantive:—

"He has been anyhow a leader of taste, a sower of faithful seeds, or whom, within the limits of his self-imposed task of reformer, one must admire both the earnestness and uprightness which have won him a universal esteem, and also the fundamental coherence even in his apparent or actually substantial contradictions."<sup>5</sup>

Eliot's **Theory of Tradition** may be interpreted as a revolt against what is called the too much "isolation of aesthetic experience"<sup>6</sup>—a practice which had become a "kind of orthodoxy"<sup>7</sup> by the 1920's. His concept of tradition implies respect for the established order, "in the sense both of authority and of form."<sup>8</sup> But, the order evoked by him is not something "dead or done with."<sup>9</sup> It is rather a living tradition as much **present** in the present itself, as the present is always a virtual part of the future. The pattern of tradition, thus en-

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2. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 199.

3. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 127.

4. Buckley Vincent—*Poetry and Morality*, p. 89.

5. Tate Allen—*T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work*, p. 277.

6. Williams Raymond—*Culture and Society*, p. 239.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Selected Prose*; Introduction, p. 11.

9. *Ibid*, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, p. 23.

visaged, is the one in which "the existing monuments form an ideal order.....complete before the new work arrives."<sup>10</sup> After the "supervention of novelty",<sup>11</sup> there is alteration and readjustment of "the relations, proportions, values, of each work of art toward the whole."<sup>12</sup> Hence, Eliot affirms that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."<sup>13</sup> In this way, the existing order is complete, only "within itself." In no case, it implies that any addition or modification is absolutely ruled out.

It is here, with regard to this particular aspect, that Eliot departs from the Augustan emphasis of tradition. The Augustans took tradition as immutable and complete in all respects, while Eliot's theory takes an altogether different view. The living tradition is continuously being modified, re-adjusted, added, or even altered by the appearance, so to say, of every new work of art. What Eliot asks of the poets is not the apish or passive acceptance of the past. He wants them to "develop or procure its consciousness",<sup>14</sup> in order to enlighten their own works. This consciousness or what Eliot calls the "historical sense"<sup>15</sup> would make the writer acutely conscious of "his place in time, of his own contemporaneity."<sup>16</sup> As a result, he will become fully aware of his literary environs as also of the nature of art he is expected to create. Eliot feels that the moment an artist becomes aware of the presence of the past, tradition would certainly help in solving difficulties and providing guide-lines for bringing out works wherein, dead artists "assert their immortality most vigorously."<sup>17</sup> Tradition, in this context, assumes the role of a repository of literary values. Its nature becomes positively classical in as far as it substitutes the "historical sense" in place of the "inner

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10. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 50.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. Eliot, T. S. *Selected Prose*, p. 22.

voice" of the Romanticists. The rule of sheer emotionalism goes and once again, discipline of objective authority is introduced. Eliot's basic contribution, which the **Theory of Tradition** highlights, lies in the fact that the writer is no more considered an "unacknowledged legislator" of the world. In fact, the sense of tradition places before him certain obligations, which as artist, he must fulfil in a judicious manner. Moreover, it is he, who not only preserves tradition, but if need be, also alters that which already exists. Eliot's concept of tradition does not imply anything, entirely new and original. It simply systematises that which critics have spoken from time to time. The Augustans had always stood for a stricter adherence to the rule of tradition; but still, none of them could evolve out a systematic theory. It is Eliot who not only theorises on the role of tradition but also develops through its tissues a new literary concept—the concept which regards all literature as an organic whole. It is because of this concept, followed by Eliot's own practice of bringing "the 17th century back to English tradition",<sup>18</sup> that even those writers who were once considered, minor and ordinary, have got their due places in the annals of literary hierarchy. His own observations on this point are significant:—

"There are new and strange objects in the foreground, to be drawn accurately in proportion to the more familiar ones which now approach the horizon, where all but the most eminent become invisible to the naked eye."<sup>19</sup>

Eliot's **Theory of Poetry** and **Theory of Impersonality** may be taken to mean as important corollaries of his **Theory of Tradition**. Both are significantly valuable in as far as they elaborate the "creative process" that goes to make a poem. Eliot tries to explain a poem and its composition in terms of "impersonal emotions."<sup>20</sup> His understanding of the whole "creative process" involves a two-tier working of the poet's personality. First, he must submit to the authority of poetic tradition.<sup>21</sup> Second, he should closely understand and follow

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18. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 113.

19. Eliot, T. S.—*U.P.U.C.*, p. 108.

20. *Selected Prose; Tradition and Individual Talent*, p. 23.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

the literary heritage of his own people.<sup>22</sup> Such an interaction between the poet's mind and the mind of his own country would yield a poetic personality<sup>23</sup> which, retaining a certain individuality, will be better equipped for the creative purposes of an impersonal art. Passing through such a graduated development, or what Eliot calls "the extinction of personality",<sup>24</sup> the poet becomes a medium "capable of relating"<sup>25</sup> the "accumulated wisdom of time"<sup>26</sup> to the problems of art, culture and society. Eliot asserts that the poet has not "a personality to express but a particular medium."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it is this very medium which regulates the combination of poets' "impressions and experiences"<sup>28</sup> in such a way as to give an artistic appeal to the poem. Its perfection, according to Eliot, will proportionately vary with the quantum of impersonality the poet has been able to achieve through the interplay of tradition. Hence, he declares:—

"the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates."<sup>29</sup>

But in his essay on *Yeats*,<sup>30</sup> Eliot has appended a plausible modification. Now, he does not advocate his earlier notion of "total extinction of personality" of the artist. On the other hand, he adopts a mid-way course or a kind of golden mean. Nevertheless, there is no retraction from the basic concept of the "creative process." Only the stress is shifted from "depersonalization to universalization"<sup>31</sup> of "emotions and feelings",<sup>32</sup> which constitute the material for a poem. It may better be called a gradual immersion of the poet's personality into something, general and universal.

22. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 24.

23. Max Well, D. E. S.—*The Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, p. 23.

24. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 25.

25. Max Well, D. E. S.—*The Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, p. 23.

26. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 25.

27. *Ibid*, p. 27.

28. *Ibid*.

29. *Ibid*, p. 26.

30. *Ibid*, p. 189.

31. *Ibid*.

32. *Ibid*, p. 26.

The shift, mentioned above, together with the retractions on Milton throw some valuable light on some basic aspects of Eliot's criticism. In the first instance, they show its empirical character; secondly, they display Eliot's "power to repent"<sup>33</sup>—the sure test of a critic's intellectual integrity and honesty, thirdly, they throw light on an important aspect of Eliot's literary criticism.

Eliot justifies the retractions on the grounds he has discussed in *The Music of Poetry*. He had stated therein that his critical method was that of a poet "always trying to defend the kind of poetry he was writing."<sup>34</sup> In "*Milton II*" he again refers to the same point by distinguishing between the interests of a scholar and that of a practitioner.<sup>35</sup> He goes as far as to define that the "scholar's interest is in the permanent, the practitioners in the immediate."<sup>36</sup> Eliot's contention is simple. He and his friends opposed Milton in the initial stages, as they felt that his influence would retard the process of bringing language back to the colloquial speech in which all of them were engaged as practitioners. The language having been brought back to the colloquial speech and the poets having been "sufficiently removed from Milton",<sup>37</sup> they can now afford to study his work "without danger and with profit to their poetry and to the English language."<sup>38</sup>

As for the phrases: **Dissociation of Sensibility**; **Objective Correlative**; and **Auditory Imagination**, Eliot's own observations, made in 1961, are significant. He acknowledges that they have been "useful in their time."<sup>39</sup> He feels that even if they go out of fashion completely,<sup>40</sup> they have served their turn as "stimuli",<sup>41</sup> to arouse critical thinking of others. But,

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33. Rajan, B.—*The Overwhelming Question in T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work* (ed.) by Allen Tate, p. 364.

34. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P., p. 26.

35. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 125.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 19.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

his final affirmation is the most valuable as it embodies, again, one of the basic tenets of his literary criticism:—

“But I prophesy that if my phrases are given consideration a century hence, it will be only in their historical context, by scholars interested in the mind of my generation.”<sup>42</sup>

It means that the tenets he has tried to formulate and enforce have no “absolute validity in his eyes”;<sup>43</sup> they are closely related to “historical circumstances.”<sup>44</sup> In the first instance, as a critic, he does not belong to those who are temperamentally fit for bringing out legislation in the field of criticism. Secondly, even if he gives sometimes an impression of that type, it is only in relation to a specific class, category or generation of authors. In *The Frontiers of Criticism*, written in 1956, he elaborates the same principle:—

“Thirty years ago, it seems to have been the latter type of criticism, the impressionistic, that had caused the annoyance I felt when I wrote on the *Function of Criticism*. Today it seems to me that we need to be more on guard against the purely explanatory.”<sup>45</sup>

Eliot's final position in this respect is very convincing. The explanation he gives, is contained by his own assertion that “no generation is interested in Art in quite the same way as any other.”<sup>46</sup> Each one has to cater to new problems, needs and tastes which makes “new assessments necessary.”<sup>47</sup>

Much criticism has been levelled against Eliot's statement that a poem in some sense possesses a “life of its own.”<sup>48</sup> Ransom and Winters have criticised Eliot for what they allege this as a “doctrine of poetic automatism.”<sup>49</sup> Both of them feel that Eliot's affirmation implies an “abdication of poet's pro-

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42. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 19.

43. Praz Mario—*Eliot as a Critic in Eliot: The Man and His Work* by Allen Tate (ed.), p. 276.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P., pp. 117-18.

46. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 109.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, Introduction.

49. Ransom, J. Crowe—*The New Criticism*, p. 152

per responsibility."<sup>50</sup> They argue that since the poet is making an evaluation, he must remain "fully in control of his poem."<sup>51</sup> But such criticism of Eliot appears to be far-fetched. He has nowhere suggested the abdication of the poet's authority over his poem. Even in his essay on **Tradition and The Individual Talent**, where he develops the notion of "extinction of personality",<sup>52</sup> he does not fail to mention that a great deal in the writing of poetry must be "conscious and deliberate."<sup>53</sup> It virtually means that at no stage of a poem's development, the poet is to become passive or dormant; nor does it, in any way, suggest the lack of poet's direct control over the poem. Eliot's concept of "sensuous apprehension of thought"<sup>54</sup> fully endorses the same view. Brooks' remarks are significant:—

"Eliot's metaphor about the poem's 'life' and his suggestion that the poet's primary task is to foster and nurture that life are not incorrigibly irrational. It is possible to argue that the poem like a growing plant, naturally grows toward the light and unless interfered with, tends to grow straight."<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, a pre-planned or over-emphasized control of the poet on the poem may obstruct its river-like natural march; may retard its continuous flow; and consequently, may pervert it to the unwarranted stagnancy of a mere dam. As a natural consequence of the stress on the poem having its "own life" most of the new critics tend to follow the vogue of treating art as "autonomous and self-explanatory."<sup>56</sup> They isolate the work of art and take it as a "thing *per se*."<sup>57</sup> But Eliot has his own reservations on this point. His position is more rational as compared to that of the new critics. Accord-

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50. Wimsatt and Brooks—*Literary Criticism: A Short History*, p. 676.

51. *Ibid*, p. 670.

52. *Selected Prose*, p. 25.

53. *Ibid*, p. 29.

54. *Ibid*, p. 113.

55. Brooks Cleanth—*Literary Criticism; A Short History*, pp. 676-77.

56. Gardner Helen—*The Business of Criticism*, p. 18.

57. *Ibid*.

ing to him, a work of art may "stand by itself",<sup>58</sup> but it does not necessarily have to "stand alone."<sup>59</sup> He is opposed to see literature stripped of all contexts. He condemns the practice of estimating literary merit in "complete isolation";<sup>60</sup> and refers to it as nothing else than "illusion."<sup>61</sup> He feels that literary criticism must "define its own boundaries"<sup>62</sup> and if need be, must go even "beyond them."<sup>63</sup> As to the position of the critic, Eliot affirms that he is "the whole man—a man with convictions and principles and of knowledge and experience of life."<sup>64</sup>

Eliot is basically opposed to any sort of infringement of the reader's rights vis-a-vis his aesthetic experience. He feels that the experience which a poem imparts to its reader is "conditioned by the individual's experience of life and art."<sup>65</sup> The function of the critic is to help the readers to "read for themselves and not to read for them."<sup>66</sup> He must honour their sensibility and should in no case thrust upon them his own theories. His primary interest is to help them to "understand and enjoy",<sup>67</sup> and he should so elucidate a work of art as to exert its full power. But Eliot thinks that any criticism can only "lead us to the door: we must find our way in."<sup>68</sup> It would naturally depend on our own "sensibility, intelligence and capacity for wisdom."<sup>69</sup> Hence, Eliot asserts that the meaning of a poem is "what the poem means to different readers."<sup>70</sup> He re-iterates that the job of the critic is to "set

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58. Rajan, B.—*The Overwhelming Question in T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Mission* (ed.) by Allen Tate, p. 366.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Eliot, T. S.—*To Criticise the Critic*, p. 26.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 215.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

65. Gardner, Helen—*The Business of Criticism*, p. 17.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 116.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*, p. 113.



us face to face with and then leave use alone with it.”<sup>71</sup>

Eliot’s contribution to dramatic criticism—theoretical as well as practical—is equally significant. In this respect, he has made some valuable and basic assertions. He affirms that all poetry even a lyric from the Greek anthology is “dramatic.”<sup>72</sup> “Poetry”, he says, “must justify itself dramatically”;<sup>73</sup> and as such, no play should be written in verse for which prose is “**dramatically** adequate.”<sup>74</sup> In his view, the theatre is an “ideal medium”<sup>75</sup> for poetry. It can also serve as a “direct means”<sup>76</sup> of promoting its social usefulness for the obvious reason that it has the capacity to provide to its audience “several levels of consciousness.”<sup>77</sup> Apart from Eliot’s theorization about drama, his efforts for the revival of verse drama are no less important. May be, the interplay between his theory and practice is not as promising in his plays as it has been in his poems; yet, whatever he was able to achieve in the field of poetic drama, has already carved out a “preparatory”<sup>78</sup> base for its future progress and development.

Eliot’s social criticism is very illuminating in as far as it throws a flood of light on some of the most relevant problems of contemporary society. His definition of culture as a “whole way of life”<sup>79</sup> provides sufficient clues to the understanding of his basic approach which is “organic rather than atomic.”<sup>80</sup> His views on religion have been widely criticised. But, whatever he has theorized and advocated in this regard is certainly of great value to the modern concept of sociology and anthropology.<sup>81</sup> The very fact that Eliot does not sacrifice his artistic

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71. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 117.

72. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Essays*, p. 28.

73. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 72.

74. *Ibid.*

75. Eliot, T. S.— U.P.U.C.

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*

78. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 72.

79. Williams Raymond—*Culture and Society*, p. 235.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

81. *Ibid.*

and religious faiths to "easy popularity",<sup>82</sup> commands our respect, even if he is not able to "win our agreement."<sup>83</sup>

As to Eliot's critical method, we may simply assert that it is usually one of extracting assent than of provoking reaction or disapproval. His exposition is mostly marked by "cautious stages of definition, doubt, reservation and qualification to final affirmation."<sup>84</sup> In his earlier prose criticism, he is occasionally pontifical but his later essays and addresses reflect much of that rhetorical grace and cadence for which most of his critical writings have received general recognition. His style is devoid of metaphor and ornament. It is always replete with an unfailing sense of detachment—the first requisite of a major critic. His method in criticism may be called perfectly dialectical, which on its own, has established a new scientific order in revaluating English literary tradition. In this respect, Edmund Wilson's observations are significant:—

"T. S. Eliot has undertaken a kind of scientific study of aesthetic values: avoiding impressionistic rhetoric and *a priori* aesthetic theories alike, he compares works of literature coolly and tries to distinguish between different orders of artistic effects and the different degrees of satisfaction to be derived from them."<sup>85</sup>

According to Eliot, the best of his literary criticism consists of "essays on poets and poetic dramatists, who had influenced him."<sup>86</sup> It is the outcome of what he himself relates: "the prolongation of the thinking that went into the formation of my verse."<sup>87</sup> In fact, Eliot is a poet-cum-critic of the line and order of Dryden, Johnson and Coleridge. Their works, as also his own, amply display the convergence of two directions of sensibility—the creative and the critical. As such, Eliot's criticism can be fully appreciated only, when it is considered in relation to the poetry he has himself written.<sup>88</sup> His

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82. Max Well, D. E. S.—*The Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, p. 212.

83. *Ibid.*

84. Hayward John—Introduction, p. 12.

85. Wilson Edmund—*Axel's Castle*, p. 115.

86. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 106.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid*

progress as a poet is congruent with his progress as a critic. Each re-animates the other.<sup>89</sup>

The exploratory nature of Eliot's studies of Laforgue, Baudelaire, Donne and other Shakespearian and Jacobean dramatists establish his claim to be an ardent adherent of tradition, of which, he has so powerfully spoken in his essay *Tradition and The Individual Talent*.<sup>90</sup> The interest he shows in these authors is not purely academic. It displays in him "the historical sense",<sup>91</sup> which, according to Eliot, is indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet "beyond his twenty-fifth year."<sup>92</sup> The study is also inspired by what he calls "personal search"<sup>93</sup> for a suitable style in poetry. His search for a new technique after the masters of the past, has other complexions also. It represents in him, what Pound has qualified as the "true Dantescan Voice."<sup>94</sup> In his *Essay on Dante*, Eliot affirms:—

"To pass on to posterity one's own language, more highly developed, more refined, and more precise than it was before one wrote it, that is the highest possible achievement of the poet as poet."<sup>95</sup>

Which means that a major poet ought "to preserve, develop and even restore the health of language." His primary duty is to "give body to the soul of language."<sup>96</sup> No wonder, that Eliot's genius, great as it was, sets him forth to reconstruct the new language of poetry "out of the dust bowl of modern speech."<sup>97</sup>

Eliot's passion for restoring health of language is linked with another important aspect of his literary criticism. It

89. Rajan, B. (ed.)—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 126.

90. *Selected Prose*, p. 21.

91. *Ibid*, p. 22.

92. *Ibid*.

93. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 66.

94. Tate Allen (ed.)—*Eliot: The Man and His Work*, p. 89.

95. *Selected Prose*, p. 95.

96. *Ibid*.

97. Bradbrook, M. C.—*Eliot; A Study by Several Hands*, p. 127;  
(ed.) B. Rajan.

exemplifies an important aspect of his poetic practice. In his essay "**Donne in Our Time**", Eliot has prescribed that a poet in his formative stage must idolize a specific poet or a specific school of poetry for his own guidance and training. To a large extent, Baudelaire was this poet for Eliot.<sup>98</sup> In precept and practice; in outlook and attitude; and in plans and performance both the poets give evidence of some common qualities. For Eliot, Baudelaire was more than a poet: he is an artist *par excellence*; not that, he found a superficial form but that, he was also searching for a "form of life."<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, Eliot has his own reservations. In his later poetry, he *outreached* Baudelaire: Baudelaire sees the seamy side of life while Eliot has a faith to live on.

Before embarking on the actual achievement of Eliot's pattern of language, let us try to have some idea of what he expects from a poem to be. He feels that a poem has its own existence—an existence lying somewhere between the writer and the reader.<sup>100</sup> He is one with Prof. Richards who says, "it is never what a poem says that matters, but what it *is*."<sup>101</sup> As to its logical function, the minimum he wants is its capacity "to move."<sup>102</sup> But he is not prepared to adjudge this capacity through the Arnoldian doctrine of "touch-stone" lines and passages.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, the strength of a poem must grow out of "the whole poem" itself.<sup>104</sup> Eliot's remarks on **Grecian Urn** and **King Lear** clearly demonstrate the way he envisages the poem to develop as an organic whole.

On the structural plane, Eliot believes that "the poem comes before the form."<sup>105</sup> He insists upon the inner unity, which he calls unique to every poem, as against the outer unity,

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98. Tate Allen (ed.)—*Eliot; The Man and His Work*, p. 300.

99. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Prose*, p. 178.

100. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 30.

101. *Ibid*, p. 17.

102. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 30.

103. *Ibid*.

104. *Ibid*.

105. *Ibid*, p. 37.

which is only "typical."<sup>106</sup> In its practical aspects, the growth of language requires operation upon two stages—the exploratory and the developmental.<sup>107</sup> The first stage involves the poet in slowly adopting his form to colloquial speech;<sup>108</sup> while in the second stage, he should experiment with a view to making music out of the sense of structure and sense of rhythm.<sup>109</sup> It must be borne in mind that in the strict Eliotian sense, meaning is part of the structural pattern of a poem. It cannot be sequestered either from its structure or from its rhythm. As to the nature of this linguistic pattern, Eliot makes it clear:—

"Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language to its meaning."<sup>110</sup>

The volume—**Prufrack and Other Observations**, records "the impression of a remarkable technique, already flexible and accomplished."<sup>111</sup> These early poems display the influence of Corbiere and Laforgue with Baudelaire in the background. The flexibility of the technique springs directly from the use of such devices as fluid metre, urban settings, literary allusions, ironic asides and intermingled nature of sense-impressions. The opening lines of **The Love Song** indicate the break from the old poetry wherein a mystifying situation is created by the use of colloquial language:—

"Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table;  
  
Let us go through certain half deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats;  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And Sawdust restaurants with Oyster-shells;

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106. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 37.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

110. *Selected Prose*, p. 112.

111. Ford Boris (ed.)—*The Modern Age*, p. 330.

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.<sup>113</sup>

The poem may particularly be noted for its effective use of "imagery" which is mostly drawn from the contemporary life. The thoughts are recreated into feeling, a feature he greatly admired in the poetry of the metaphysical poets. The imagery of the poem high-lights the directions, which Eliot is aspiring to give to the new technique. The way he conveys different states of the distressed mind of Prufrock is at once new and thrilling. The use of the visual expressions lends an extra-ordinary grace to the whole poem. To apprehend the state of agony through the image of the evening as "a patient etherised upon a table" or to experience the "lethargic animalism of life in the great city",<sup>113</sup> in the image of the yellow fog as "a sleepy cat that rubs its back upon the windows", are very exhilarating experiences for the lovers of poetry in the early decades of the century. The atmosphere of the poem is vague and uncertain but the images, which are diverse and diffused, give the poem a sort of distinctive colour. The half-audible images of "muttering retreats" and "talking women" are full of their own suggestiveness. Apart from imagery, Eliot has applied what he himself advocates the "method of contrast between fixity and flux as the very life of verse." Prufrock's environment comprises stable and hard objects, while the mood he depicts is vague and vacillating. He happens to face a serious problem but refuses to move forward to its logical solution.

The most fascinating aspect of **The Love Song** is its "power to move."<sup>114</sup> Its appeal does not lie in isolated lines, but the whole poem moves in one organism and whatever mood it has to communicate that grows out of the poem itself. The rhythm, structure, meaning, imagery, even syntax, all converge together to make it what it is. Being perfect, the poem

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112. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 11.

113. Pinto V de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*.

114. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 30.

displays a remarkable likeness of content and form—a relevance which Eliot has so often stressed.<sup>115</sup>

For the full appreciation of the point raised here, it seems necessary to revert back to Eliotian acceptance of “reality” of a poem. As already stated, Eliot’s approach in this respect is Baudelairean. Eliot sees in Baudelaire a new kind of “theological innocence.”<sup>116</sup> The French poet’s assertion that “it is better to do evil than to do nothing”,<sup>117</sup> though paradoxical, marks for Eliot a new perspective of looking at poetic reality. Goethe and Baudelaire are great because both of them look into this reality—the plight of “human situation.”<sup>118</sup> They understand and foresee a great deal and picture through poetry what is a “must” for a great poet—“the sense of the age.”<sup>119</sup>

Seen in this light, *The Love Song of Prufrock* is a great poem. It is a landmark in English poetry. Not only does it depart from the conventional patterns but the poem also incorporates into its theme a new view of life: it depicts beatitude in terms of “the boredom, the horror and the glory”,<sup>120</sup> of the contemporary urban life. Its most significant feature is the way Prufrock’s irony is made to reflect on a general human predicament besides being directed against himself.<sup>121</sup>

“*Portrait of a Lady*”—the 2nd important poem of the selection—is also notable for its flexibility, control and precision. The movement of the verse is perfect. The tone is more subtle, and the technique promises a richer development. The atmosphere is dominated by the imagery drawn from the contemporary life.

The lines such as:—

Now that Lilacs are in bloom  
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room.

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115. *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound*; Introduction.

116. *Selected Prose*, p. 176.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*

120. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 106.

121. Ford Boris (ed.)—*The Modern Age*, p. 333.

And twists one in her fingers while she talks,  
 'Ah my friend, you do not know, you do not know  
 What life is, you hold it in your hands';  
 (Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)

.....  
 .....  
 I smile of course,  
 And go on drinking tea.<sup>122</sup>

show Eliot's power to "build up the perception of the profound significance",<sup>123</sup> on seemingly trivial matters of life. The portrait of a woman, standing and looking at a typical way, is certainly an "expression of character."<sup>124</sup> As for its theme, the poem is not so much the "Portrait of a Lady" as the portrait of another uncertain Prufrock, adolescent rather than prematurely aged, but at the same time suspended between feelings of attraction and repulsion.<sup>125</sup>

The volume of 1917 may be said to concentrate on the sordid and dreary aspects of the modern urban life, portrayed in the background of "ironic gaiety and gusto."<sup>126</sup> As a whole, the poems satisfy the following criterion he has hinted out in **The Sacred Wood**:—

"Any life, if accurately and profoundly penetrated is interesting and always strange."<sup>127</sup>

The next group of poems of 1920 is more serious. The essential attitude towards life is still unresolved. Eliot introduces yet another new pattern in these poems. In place of free verse, he substitutes the strict rhyming quatrains of Gautier. **Gerontion** is the most important poem in this selection. It may be noted, first, for its prophetic vision. Second, the speaker now is not a living character like Prufrock or the Lady: he is an impersonal symbol—Western civilization depicted in the form of an old man. Third, the poem is the first of its kind where Eliot tries to incorporate the idea of

122. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber.

123. Pinto V de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 186.

124. *Ibid.*

125. Williamson George—*A Readers' Guide to Eliot*, p. 71.

126. Pinto V de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 187.

127. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 81.



tradition into the central theme of a poem. Fourth, the concept of time in respect of its various contexts: of individual, society and eternity, is developed for the first time. Fifth, the poem records Eliot's recurrent theme of mixing "memory and desire", together. Lastly, **Gerontion** shows greater skill on the part of the poet, to develop still further the method of "sensuous apprehension of thought" or the technique of "dramatization of emotions" through "objective correlatives."

**Gerontion** is prefixed with an introductory quotation which shows a significant relevance to the impersonal and detached atmosphere of the poem. It runs:—

Thou hast nor youth nor age  
But as it were an after dinner sleep  
Dreaming of both.<sup>128</sup>

As against the personal nature of distress and disillusionment in the poems of 1917, the poet here probes life on a deeper level and questions "what it all come to."<sup>129</sup> The well sustained references to hollowness of life contained in the line "Thou hast nor youth nor age", serves as a key to the skeptical bearings of the poem. Naturally, the broodings of the old man as to the ultimate outcome of life, its meaning and its residue, assume a serious tone. The opening lines:—

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,  
Being read to by a boy waiting for rain.<sup>130</sup>

generate a process of rethinking to be followed immediately by an amalgam of "memory and desire." The old man in his "dry month" waits for the elixir of "rain." In an atmosphere of barrenness, the very idea that it would never rain, stirs his feelings of despair and disappointment. He laments for the loss:—

My house is a decayed house  
And the fur squats on, the window sill, the owner  
Spawned in some estaminet.

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128. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 31; Quoted from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*.

129. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 72.

130. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 31.

But confesses:—

I an old man  
A dull head among windy spaces.

What about his world? It is dry, barren and unproductive:—

Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.

Despite all this, Eliot presents the man ruminating over the past memories of the spiritual rejuvenation:—

In the juvenescence of the year  
Came Christ the tiger  
In depraved May,.....

The last two phrases are fine specimens of Eliot's condensed expression. The poet in Eliot shows great skill in contrasting and fusing together, the diametrically different emotions and feelings. The passage is important in another respect also: it provides an example of Eliot's power to picture obscure states of mind through the medium of ordinary speech. The way "fear of life" hovers over the whole atmosphere of **Gerontion** brings it closer to the **The Waste Land**—the next best poem of T. S. Eliot.

**The Waste Land** was hailed as a great poem. Its symphonic character earned from no less a person than Prof. I. A. Richards, the title of "The Music of Ideas."<sup>131</sup> In the degree of technical achievement, the poem stands unrivalled in all its earlier counterparts. The method applied is mythical. The theme incorporated is the vision of a "devitalised world"<sup>132</sup>—a world completely devoid of spiritual values. The atmosphere of the poem is replete with the ever increasing sense of pity and terror of the contemporary society. It is in **The Waste Land** that Eliot makes free use of psychology, sexology and anthropology. The underlying idea is the sexual impotence which has been used as a symbol for the spiritual disintegration of the modern world. The plan of the poem presents a synthetic appearance of its five divisions—each distinguished from the other by the odd variety of the ironical contrasts. It is Tiresias—the legendary prophet of the

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131. Richards, I. A.—*The Principles of Criticism*.

132. Pinto V de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 192.

Greeks—who synthesizes the various elements of **The Waste Land**. He may be described as the embodiment of the modern mind, “keen to observe”<sup>133</sup> but “powerless to act.”<sup>134</sup>

**The Waste Land** is pictured with all the sordid aspects of the Grail legend. It is a dry and haunted place not easy to know or guess:—

Son of man,  
You cannot say or guess, for you only know.  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead dice gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water.

The poem records a great advancement in Eliot's basic method of contrast—a method which is so recurrent in his later poetry. **The Waste Land** depicts the sense of the age as seen through the Baudelairean angle.<sup>135</sup> Here the contrast is between two kinds of life and two kinds of death.<sup>136</sup> A life devoid of significance is death; while a death made for some sacrificial cause may be inspiring and life-giving. The fact that people in **The Waste Land** are no more able to discriminate between evil and good, supports the Baudelairean concept of reality as if they do not exist at all.<sup>137</sup> The opening lines:—

April is the cruel last month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.<sup>138</sup>

suggest the same analogy. In this section, the poet tries to develop the theme of longing for death. The people suffer from an ever lurking complex of death-in-life. They fear to live in reality. Hence, April—a time of mixing ‘memory and desire’ reminds us of the opening lines of **Gerontion** which

133. Pinto V de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 194.

134. *Ibid.*

135. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 8.

136. Brooks Cleanth; in *Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 8.

137. *Selected Prose*, p. 174.

138. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 51.

evoke emotional intensities of the highest order. Closely connected with this is the use of paradoxical symbols. If we take a surface view "they resist" what Brooks calls "equation with simple meaning."<sup>139</sup> But considered deeply, they render great help in simplifying the complexity of diverse experiences. For instance the lines:—

You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;  
 'They called me the hyacinth girl.  
 —Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,  
 Your arms' full, and your hair wet, I could not  
 Speak, and eyes failed, I was neither  
 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
 Looking into the heart of light and the silence.<sup>140</sup>

appear to reflect on a vision of beauty and goodness of life. The imagery used is sexual. Ordinarily, a forth-right experience of some joyous moments is conveyed. But, a little of deep study would suggest quite a contrary impression. Actually, the protagonist suffers from a state of "obscure vacuum." His eyes "failed" and he "knew" nothing. He felt as if "neither living nor dead"—a kind of typical death. There the experience, in its intensity, is an experience amounting to that of death. It hustles the protagonist to look into the "heart of light and the silence." The duality of such surface parallelism, subscribes to the basic method of the poem, where the poet is applying the principle of "complexity" to work out its effects. Again, the two sections—"Death by Water" and "The Fire Sermon"—form a contrast with each other. It is a contrast between the symbolism of **fire** and the symbolism of **water**. Cleanth Brooks rightly comments on its force "as a symbol of surrender and relief through surrender."<sup>141</sup> Similarly, the symbol of "**A Game of Chess**" implies two meanings: first, the game is used as a device to keep the widow occupied; while her daughter-in-law is being seduced;<sup>142</sup> second, the variety of the traditional environment, pictured in the room as contrasted with the "game of chess", symbolizes "the

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139. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 24.

140. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 52.

141. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 24.

142. *Ibid*, p. 18.

inhuman abstraction of the modern mind."<sup>143</sup> It brings out the emptiness of life and stresses at its nothingness in a modulated way:—

Nothing again nothing.

'Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you Remember nothing?'

In this way, the "forest of symbols" which *The Waste Land* abounds in, lends it a lustre of varied sense-impressions. On the contemporary level, the technique has pictured, in the form of a compendium, an urban background of the "Unreal City." On the metaphysical level, it has been able to comprehend spiritual disintegration of the modern mind. In applying the concept of sensory apprehension of thought, the poem may justly be called the "Poem of the Age". Its evidence lies in the very texture of its poetry.

At this stage, a casual reference to the allusive nature of *The Waste Land* appears necessary. The poem is overloaded with the recondite learning of Eliot. The literal quotations and abbreviated passages from the old authors are a part of the Eliotian technique of concentrated expressions. His erudite scholarship forms an essential feature of his "sensuous imagery."<sup>144</sup> May be, that the poem has its own limitations—limitations inherent in its very comprehensiveness, organisation and structure. Still, the fact is, that it is "genuine poetry" and "does possess the power to communicate before it is understood."<sup>145</sup> The absence of "notes" does not materially affect its movements. Irrespective of its allusive setting or symbolic expressions, *The Waste Land* is "obviously a poem."<sup>146</sup> It grows out of its own structure, and is a "self-subsistent poem."<sup>147</sup> The sense of its consistent impression conveyed in lines such as:—

I think we are in rats' alley

Where the dead men lost their bones.<sup>148</sup>

143. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 15.

144. Pinto de S.—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 196.

145. *Selected Prose, Dante*, p. 94.

146. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 94.

147. *Ibid.*

148. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 55.

or

Who is the third who walks always beside you?<sup>149</sup>

or

Here is no water but only rock

Rock and no water.....<sup>150</sup>

has not been imposed: it has been revealed.<sup>151</sup>

Eliot's pre-occupation with "horror and boredom" of the decaying civilization is further continued in two other poems: *The Hollow Men*; and *Sweeney Agonistes*. The world of the first is similar to that of *The Waste Land*. It is inhabited by men who are "hollow"<sup>152</sup> and "stuffed."<sup>153</sup> Their voices are "dried", "quiet" and "meaningless." The poet pictures modern humanity as having no eyes. The vague optimism of the hollow men, to recover eye-sight after death, is categorically denounced:—

Sightless, eyeless

The eyes reappear.

.....

.....

The hope only

of empty men.<sup>154</sup>

At the end of the poem, Eliot strikes a gloomy note of irony and wit, which refers to the gruesome helplessness of modern civilization:—

This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper.<sup>155</sup>

"*Sweeney Agonistes*" presents the venue of a London flat where two prostitutes entertain some officials. It is a satiric melodrama, composed in irony of the nursery rhymes. The theme is based on the Baudelairean concept:—

"That the sexual act as evil is more dignified, less boring,

149. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 65.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

151. Rajan, B.—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 34.

152. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 77.

153. *Ibid.*

154. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

155. *Ibid.*

than as the natural life-giving cherry automatism of the modern world."<sup>156</sup>

Sweeney's final declaration of "Life is Death" embodies another attempt of the poet to focus interest on the same human predicament, which one is given to understand through *The Waste Land* and other earlier poems.

In between "Sweeney Agonistes" and "Ash Wednesday", there stands a new kind of poetry, comprising the "Ariel Poems"; *The Journey of the Magi*; *A Song for Simeon*; *Animula* and *Marina*. These poems are associated with the post-conversion era of Eliot. They show a shift in the stress which he has been laying since the beginning of his poetic career. It is a shift from the sordid discomfiture of the outer-world to the exigencies of the inner one. Now, may be, under the influence of Christianity, one marks a threefold change in the pattern of Eliot's poetry: first, it assumes a sort of religious complexion; second, it displays a feeling of withdrawal from the "nightmare visions of the modern world, that haunted the earlier poems";<sup>157</sup> and third, the style touches new heights of serenity and sublimity as against the ironic sting of the twenties.

*Ash Wednesday* may be considered the first major poem, embodying this change in stress and strain. A simple connotation of its title suggests that Eliot, now, is on the way to furnish some positive scheme of values. On *Ash Wednesday* is performed the ritual of anointing the fore-head with ashes,<sup>158</sup> while the priest recites:—

"Remember man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return."<sup>159</sup>

The atmosphere of the poem also registers an important shift. The dull horror of the "unreal city" has disappeared. Instead, the poet seems to pray in a place of solitude.<sup>160</sup>

And I pray that I may forget

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156. Williamson, George—*A Readers' Guide to T. S. Eliot*, p. 195.

157. Pinto de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 201.

158. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 12.

159. *Ibid.*

160. Pinto de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 202.





One no more feels the ironic sting of any of the earlier three poems: *The Waste Land*; *Gerontion*; and *The Hollow Men*. *Ash Wednesday* does not echo the poet's "dread of death and dissolution."<sup>168</sup> It does not recall the hard gruesomeness suggested by the lines:—

Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men  
Or with nails he'll dig it up again.<sup>169</sup>

In *Ash Wednesday*, even the very agents of dissolution no longer seem terrifying, but are "merged into the vision of death itself as the promised land."<sup>170</sup>

In the matter of technical accomplishment, the poem is perfect. On its first reading, one is captivated by its peculiar lucidity and translucency, which is not merely intellectual but poetic also. The second section affords some fine specimens of great poetry. For instance, the use of such imagery as the "three white leopards", the "brightness of scattered bones", the "cool of the day" and the "picture of the Lady", who

.....is withdrawn

In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown.<sup>171</sup>

create an extraordinary pure impression of whiteness<sup>172</sup>—an impression which may be classed as one of the rarest to be sought with sensuous effects of colour. Moreover, *Ash Wednesday* is equally superb in creating effects, purely through the rhythm of sounds.<sup>173</sup> According to Matthiessen, it has the best chance of appealing to an audience that could neither read nor write. He asserts:—

"For T. S. Eliot has been able to summon up all the resources of his auditory imagination in such a way that the Listener can begin to feel the rare force of what is being communicated and accept the poem as a kind of ritualistic chant long before his mind is able to give any statement of its meaning."<sup>174</sup>

168. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 118.

169. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 53.

170. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 118.

171. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber.

172. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 115.

173. *Ibid*, p. 114.

174. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 115.

If it is correct to infer that Eliot's early poetry "converges on **The Waste Land**, it is still more correct to qualify his later poetry as converging on **Four Quartets**<sup>175</sup>—the sequence of poems written in between 1939 and 1942. In detail and organisation, the poems may be called the masterpiece of modern English poetry.<sup>176</sup> None of the **four quartets** is half as long as **The Waste Land**; yet its musical pattern is far superior to that of the earlier poems. It establishes beyond doubt the claim of Eliot to have perfected a proper idiom out of the modern colloquial speech. It is through these poems that he works "too closely to musical analogies."<sup>177</sup> Each poem embodies what Eliot has called "the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure."<sup>178</sup> The form of the **Quartets** is one of Eliot's highest achievement:<sup>179</sup> it is subtler, more complex, and more controlled than the verse libre or irregular blank verse. Its measure shows an extra-ordinary poise, comprising lines of varying length. Opening lines of **The Burnt Norton**:—

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past.

exhibit an exemplary cadence affected jointly by the imposing rhythm, the studied repetition and the use of the key words. The "Abstract" used evocatively stresses the presence and reality of the eternal.<sup>180</sup>

The same cadence is felt throughout the passages in a longer line.

There are three conditions which often look alike  
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgrow;  
Attachment to self and to things and to person detachment  
From self and from things and from persons;  
(Little Gidding)

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175. Pinto de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 204.

176. Ford, Boris—*The Modern Age*, p. 344.

177. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 38; *The Music of Poetry*.

178. *Ibid.*

179. Pinto de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*.

180. Rajan, B (ed.)—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 81.

It suggests the "deliberateness of prose, but the effect of poetry."<sup>181</sup> The practice embodies Eliot's honest adherence to his own affirmation that "poetry has as much to learn from prose as from other poetry."<sup>182</sup> Significantly enough, the poetry involving "self"—the inconcrete—is specifically marked by a prosaic exactness. But, where the concrete is involved, the poetry becomes consciously inexact and evasive:—

There they were, dignified, invisible  
Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves  
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air.

The contrast inherent in the two passages is instructive. "Dead", is opposed to "vibrant"; and "invisible", is put against "dignified." Initially, such uses may not suggest anything substantial, or they may not take us very far, but the device involves an important principle of Eliot's literary criticism which he has elaborated in *The Music of Poetry*. It says:—

"I know that a poem or a passage of a poem, may tend to realise itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image."<sup>183</sup>

In this way, phrases such as "autumn heat"; "Mid-winter spring";<sup>184</sup> "Soul's sap";<sup>185</sup> "Zero summer";<sup>186</sup> "conscious impotence";<sup>187</sup> or "dead water and dead sand";<sup>188</sup> all point to the one and the same direction: the rhythm helps to sustain what is suggested by the diction.<sup>189</sup> Even it stimulates the process of new ideas and new images. To quote another example, Eliot in developing the concept of time into movement, has used similar image: "at the still point of the turning world"; which in its own way opens a serious meditation on time.

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181. Ford, Foris—*The Modern Age*, p. 345.

182. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 152.

183. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 38.

184. *Four Quartets*—Faber and Faber.

185. *Ibid*, p. 49.

186. *Ibid*.

187. *Ibid*, p. 54.

188. *Ibid*, p. 51.

189. Rajan, B. (ed.)—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*.

Perhaps our assessment of the *Four Quartets* would remain incomplete without referring to the following passage, where Eliot has produced a pathetic picture of the aftermath of an air-raid on London:—

In the uncertain hour before the morning  
Near the ending of interminable night  
At the recurrent end of the unending  
After the dark dove with the flickering tongue  
Had passed below the horizon of his homing.<sup>190</sup>

The lines record an indelible impact of war. They do not depict the accidents but their horrible “essence” is fully carried out.<sup>191</sup> Eliot catches the “nervous tension”<sup>192</sup> of the moment which is nowhere more, than when the dove unites the “pentecostal fire” and the “dive-bomber.”<sup>193</sup> But the most thrilling aspect of the air-raid is the symbolic annotation of the enemy bomber—the dark dove. It is the bird that haunts the skies of London. The flickering tongue is the air-man’s fire of destruction. The fellow warden Eliot encounters, reminds us of the Dantesque episode of the Holy Ghost. The “uncertain hour” assumes the form of an “intersection-time”<sup>194</sup> between London and Purgatory. Apart from its religious sanction, the whole symbolism signifies four major directions of the critical thought which Eliot has stressed from time to time. First, it reveals a personal experience which has left its definite marks on Eliot, but the poet in him has impersonalised the same into the poetry of the air-raid. Second, Eliot has not only turned sensation into thought but he has also made sensation universal. Third, though he speaks in the first person, yet in no way, obstructs the impersonal growth of *Four Quartets*.<sup>195</sup> Fourth, the appearance of the purgatorial spirit establishes a direct affinity of Eliot with Dante. Commenting that their mutual concern was speech, Eliot in one sense, reminds of an important tenet of his own criticism—

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190. *Four Quartets*—Faber and Faber, p. 52.

191. Williamson, George—*A Reader's Guide to Eliot*, p. 229.

192. Ford, Boris—*The Modern Age*, p. 347.

193. Williamson George—*A Reader's Guide to Eliot*, p. 229.

194. *Four Quartets*—Faber and Faber, p. 51.

195. Ford, Boris—*The Modern Age*, p. 347.

the function of a major poet:

Since our concern was speech and speech impelled us  
To purify the dialect of the tribe  
And urge the mind to altersight and foresight.<sup>193</sup>

We may be allowed to touch some basic aspects of Eliot as an artist. In criticism as also in poetry, his work, like that of Shakespeare, is "one continuous poem."<sup>197</sup> All his endeavours, in more than one way, leave the impression of a man of "unified sensibility" given to evolve an impersonal order in the realm of imagination. The strain of thought which characterises Eliot's concept of Art is also akin to his understanding of life and its various problems. Both Art and Life in his outlook, tend to find "significance" in an organic whole. What he spoke of Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe, is also true in his own case. His poetry displays **Abundance**, **Amplitude** and **Unity**<sup>198</sup>—the three distinctive features which he prescribes for a major poet to become universal.

In the light of the diversified nature of his poetry, one cannot get very far with him, unless one touches philosophy, theology and psychology. His theological interests have deeply penetrated into his own poetry. From the very beginning, Eliot shows that as a poet he has "other interests"<sup>199</sup> to convey—the interests that are "beyond the bounds"<sup>200</sup> of poetry. Eliot has always objected to the tendency of centrifugal individualism in society. He is against the glorification of individual's role in any sphere, whatsoever. The view of man symbolised in the comparative myths of **The Waste Land** and **Ash Wednesday** reveals his doctrinaire faith in the principle of Original Sin. To put in Miss Weston's assessment, an Eliotian man—the Heavenly Man, the Son of God—"though originally endowed with all power descends into weakness and bondage."<sup>201</sup> One can safely assert that theology and ethics

196. *Four Quartets*—Faber and Faber, p. 54.

197. Kenner Hugh—*The Invisible Poet*.

198. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 215.

199. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

200. *Ibid.*

201. Weston—Quoted in "*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*", p. 134.

have filled the contours of Eliot's poetical strain, may be, with the colours highly unpalatable to some of the ardent lovers of his own poetry. We would like to clarify here one serious misapprehension about Eliot's ethical concerns: it is incorrect to associate the theological bias with his acceptance of Christianity in the late twenties. As early as 1921, Eliot is suggesting the presence of a superhuman pattern behind the human, when he comments:—

"Marvell takes a slight affair; the feeling of a girl for her pet, and gives it a connection with that inexhaustible and terrible nebula of emotions which surrounds all our exact and practical passions."<sup>202</sup>

Moreover, Eliot's outright rejection of Arnold's theory of Poetry as "Criticism of Life";<sup>203</sup> his stress on the notion of "extinction of personality";<sup>204</sup> his emphasis on tradition as a sort of "consciousness of the past";<sup>205</sup> and finally his concept of "order", "orthodoxy", and "sensibility", all point to the one and the same aptitude—an aptitude which is fundamentally ethical. Eliot's concern with this aptitude underlies the significance of a high moral order that runs through his creative and critical efforts. According to Eliot, artistic and religious sensibilities should work in unison. The separation of the one from the other, impoverishes the artistic process.<sup>206</sup> His preference for Dante or Goethe to that of Shakespeare is inspired by the same concern. But there still remains one substantial difference between his earlier pronouncements and that of post-Conversion era. After his "Essays on Baudelaire", in 1930, Eliot is less reticent to colour his attitude with Christianity than he seems to be at the earlier stages. His concern is obviously less explicit in "The Love Song of Prufrock" as it gradually develops in *The Waste Land*; *Ash Wednesday*; and *Four Quartets*. In fact, Eliot is full of an inadvertent note of didacticism. True, he may not always invoke the

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202. Eliot, T. S.—*Selected Essays*, p. 300.

203. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. ix.

204. *Ibid*, p. 53.

205. *Ibid*, p. 49.

206. Eliot, T. S.—*The Notes on The Definition of Culture*, p. 26.

mysteries of Christianity or openly preach for its practice. Still, there exists a dominant feeling that all his poetry, either directly or indirectly almost asserts "its necessity."<sup>207</sup>

This brings us close to the problem of belief in the poetry of T. S. Eliot. In fact, the key to its understanding lies in his view of life which he has sustained through the entire body of his own poetry. Strictly speaking, Eliot is neither a church artist nor does he preach religious dogmas. Still, the life-theme or the nature of spiritual reality he incorporates into poetry, is basically religious. The texture he has chosen is not religion but the way he interweaves it, "leads towards it, goes with it and comes with it."<sup>208</sup> He is certainly methodical in saying something about religion. All his poems from **Prufrock** to **Four Quartets** are religious in as far as they inhere a sort of a voyage from within the mind of the protagonist. Granted that **Ash Wednesday** and the poems succeeding it are explicitly more religious than the poems written earlier, yet the implicit religiosity of **The Love Song**, **Gerontion** and **The Waste Land** cannot be easily set aside. They also imply the verdict of a spiritual reality or depict to an ample degree what Eliot himself has declared in **After Strange Gods**:—

"It is in fact in moments of moral and spiritual struggle depending on spiritual sanctions, rather than in those 'bewildering minutes' in which we are all very much alike, that men and women come nearest to being real."<sup>209</sup>

The earlier poems, in this sense, are the precursors of the later ones. They may not be poems of easy faith but they surely envisage the step-by-step forward development of the poet's experience. They voice, no less than the religious poems of the later period, the urge for belief and its relative importance in the superhuman order of the universe. They direct the mind of the poet from doubt, desperation and skepticism to acceptance, hope and enlightenment. Even **Prufrock** with all the agonies, fears, inabilities and indecisions of life, displays

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207. *Selected Prose*, p. 177.

208. Barber, C. L.—*The Power of Development in The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 202.

209. Eliot, T. S.—*After Strange Gods*, p. 26.

an abiding sense for beauty, love and sympathy. In **Gerontion** the accents of fear and despair are deeper, but both the poems reveal the conditions of "being real" by the juxtaposition of circumstances which result from the absence of struggle on the moral plane. Both, **Prufrock** and **Gerontion** suffer on account of their inherent weaknesses. Both try to reach out to the meaningful context of life. They fail terribly: the one for his "inertness of will"; and the other for his "passivity." Prufrock passes from one mood to other, never settling down anywhere. He gropes in his own self-conscious isolation. Gerontion, on the other hand, makes his private dilemma merge with the group or society. But the way both of them surrender themselves to death, signifies the relevance of something, which, for all intents and purposes, confirms to a spiritual reality. It may be justly implied that "humanity is condemned to a living death, because it has disobeyed the eternal moral law and profaned the divine mysteries."<sup>210</sup>

**The Waste Land** also registers a similar type of religious authenticity. Eliot himself has scolded those who declared the poem as an expression of the "disillusionment of a generation."<sup>211</sup> According to Pinto, the poem is based on a very strong belief in original sin and the value of religion.<sup>212</sup> Cleanth Brooks sees "Christian material",<sup>213</sup> operating at the centre with the only difference that Eliot "never deals with it directly."<sup>214</sup> He has tried to explain the indirectness of the religious approach on three counts: first, that the form of the poem demands it; second, the poet's concern here, is not with the re-iteration of a faith—held and agreed upon, but with the rehabilitation of a system of beliefs—known but discredited; and third, he prefers to confine himself to the poet's business. The reason is obvious: he does not enforce the didacticism, which would have invited "stock responses" and as a consequence, would have marred the power of the poem as a "self-subsistent"

210. Pinto de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 198.

211. Eliot, T. S.—*Quoted by Matthiessen: Achievement of Eliot*, p. 106.

212. Pinto de S—*Crisis in English Poetry*, p. 198.

213. Rajan, B. (ed.)—*Eliot: A Study by Several Hands*, p. 35.

214. *Ibid.*



creation. On this method of indirection, Eliot himself has made an important observation:—

“A poet may believe that he is expressing only his private experience; his lines may be for him only a means of talking about himself without giving himself away; yet for his readers what he has written may come to be the expression both of their secret feelings and of the exultation or despair of a generation. He need not know what his poetry will come to mean to others; and a prophet need not understand the meaning of his prophetic utterances.”<sup>215</sup>

Suffice it to say that the “unconscious meaning” in Eliot’s poetry is generally more important than the conscious one. In *The Waste Land* as also in his earlier poems, Eliot is dramatising or even juxtaposing the condition of a consciousness which in its logical conclusion moves towards the necessity of religion as “subtilized by Christianity.”<sup>216</sup> The technical devices such as ironic gestures, references, allusions, parallelisms, contrasts, and paradoxes, all point to the same conclusion—the authenticity of the Christian *ethos*. In fact, Eliot from the very beginning, aspires for an “organisation in art, equivalent to the Christian organisation of society.”<sup>217</sup> No doubt, *The Waste Land* incorporates allusions drawn from the non-Christian world, still, its web-like frame-work as a whole imparts the impression of the world of Christianity; while all its formal norms are deliberately kept at the back of the poem itself. For example, the narrative background of the “hyacinth girl” or of Madame Sosostriis or of Albert is merely used as a sort of parallelism to the Christian background. The way the symbol of Buddha’s Fire Sermon is juxtaposed to the Christian conditions, furnishes another example of the same device.

The end of the *Fire Sermon* explicitly points towards the Christian awareness:—

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To Carthage then I came  
Burning burning burning burning  
O Lord Thou pluckest me out  
O Lord Thou Pluckest.<sup>218</sup>

215. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 122.

216. Eliot, T. S.—*Essays Ancient and Modern*, p. 230.

217. Eliot, T. S.—*The Idea of a Christian Society*, p. 34.

218. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber, p. 62.

Presumably, the most significant acknowledgement of this awareness is contained in the admonition of the Thunder: "Datta", "dayadhyam" and "danyata", meaning "give, sympathise and control", respectively. The protagonist says:—

I have heard the key  
Turn in the door once and turn once only  
We think of the key, each in his prison  
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison  
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours  
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus.<sup>219</sup>

The individual, locked in typical isolation, can release himself only "by self-surrender and by sympathy for others."<sup>220</sup> By referring to the modern man as a "broken Coriolanus", Eliot is voicing the present dilemma which the whole world is suffering from in the welter of a confused society. The story of Coriolanus states, that his tragedy was genuine. His pride alienated him both from man and God, bringing thus, his ultimate ruin. The "revival" of the "broken Coriolanus", or the "salvation" of the modern man, lies in the virtue of humility—the opposite pole of pride—which according to Eliot, is "the most difficult of the Christian virtues."<sup>221</sup> In this connection, Dr. Leavis' assessment of:—

"I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me."<sup>222</sup>

as "exhibiting no progression",<sup>223</sup> or the comment that the poem "ends where it began",<sup>224</sup> does not appear convincing.<sup>225</sup> It is true that the "thunder" brings no rain to revive the "Waste Land"; still, the striking note of the poem at the end involves an obligatory sense of Christian responsibility. Referring to the adverse effects of secularisation on modern civilization, it points out:—

219. *Selected Poems*, p. 62.

220. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 138.

221. *Selected Prose*, essay on Baudelaire, p. 174.

222. *Selected Poems*: Faber and Faber.

223. Leavis, F. R.—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 87.

224. *Ibid.*

225. Brooks Cleanth—*A Study of Eliot*, p. 29.

London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down.<sup>226</sup>  
And then the anxiety to restore order:—

"Shall I at least set my lands in order."<sup>227</sup>

clearly affirms an ever growing feeling of the Christian awareness and its much needed contribution towards society as a whole. Eliot's own observation on Christian faith is significant:—

"I cannot see that poetry can ever be separated from something which I would call belief and to which I cannot see any reason for refusing the name of belief unless we are to reshuffle names together. It should hardly be needful to say that it will not be inevitably orthodox Christian belief, although that possibility can be entertained, since Christianity will probably continue to modify itself as in the past, into something that can be believed in."<sup>228</sup>

It is the presence of such an assurance and belief which has provided "Identity of Substance"<sup>229</sup> to all his poetry from *The Love Song* to the *Four Quartets*. Being essentially a lyrical poet, Eliot exhibits that "pious sincerity"<sup>230</sup> which is the first requisite of religious poetry. He is always faithful to his own "voices."<sup>231</sup> The poetry before *Ash Wednesday* expresses "not a self, but the struggle to find a self or do without a self."<sup>232</sup> The poetry in between *Ash Wednesday* and the *Four Quartets* is the poetry of withdrawal from the outer-world and of sojourn into the mysteries of the inner life as seen through the perspective of Christianity. The *Four Quartets* may be said to inhere the soliloquies of Eliot. The identity of substance in his poetry is marked by the integrity of his own feelings and impressions. As to his remarkable achievement in prosody, the observations of Ransom are significant:—

"Somebody, by precept and example, had to bring into the music of poetry the grace and freedom which had arrived in

226. *Selected Poems*—Faber and Faber, p. 67.

227. *Ibid.*

228. *The Enemy*; January, 1927.

229. Blackmur, R. P.—*Language as Gesture*, p. 183.

230. Eliot, T. S.—*After Strange Gods*.

231. Eliot, T. S.—O.P.P., *Three Voices of Poetry*, p. 89.

232. Barber, C. L.—in *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 210.

the art of pure music many years before. Eliot was the man."<sup>233</sup>

Looking back at the plays of Eliot, one can safely make three assertions. First, the number of his plays is smaller in proportion to the voluminous nature of his dramatic criticism. Second, the plays remain no longer isolated successes, but proclaim the beginning of a movement.<sup>234</sup> Third, though small in number, they contain a wide variety, both of method and of success.<sup>235</sup> The entire body of Eliot's dramatic production comprises: *Murder in the Cathedral*; *The Family Reunion*; *The Cocktail Party*; *Sweeney Agonistes*; *The Confidential Clerk*; and *The Rock*. The first three works may be deemed as his major plays.

In *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot has attributed the failure of the past writers of poetic drama to their beginning at the wrong end: "They have" he says "aimed at the small public which wants poetry."<sup>236</sup> In making this statement, Eliot is referring to an important principle of dramaturgy. By "aiming at small public", the critic means to suggest their inability to satisfy various levels of consciousness of the audience. In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, he further develops the same idea, when he commends theatre as the "ideal medium" for poetry and a "direct means" of its "social usefulness."<sup>237</sup> Eliot's interest in drama sprouts mainly from his firm conviction of looking forward to drama as the "most socially relevant of the arts."<sup>238</sup> He rightly feels that if the plays do not draw and cater to an audience—of all categories—they fail "artistically as well as socially."<sup>239</sup> On the touch-stone of this social verisimilitude, the later comedies of Eliot, viz., *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder States-*

233. Tate Allen (ed.) *Eliot: The Man and Work*, p. 134.

234. Williams Raymond—*Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, p. 223.

235. *Ibid.*

236. Eliot, T. S.—*The Sacred Wood*, p. 70.

237. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., p. 135.

238. Gardner, Helen—*Comedies of T. S. Eliot, C. F., T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work*, p. 160.

239. *Ibid.*

man are a great achievement in their own right. Helen Gardner rightly remarks that these plays catch the accents and the moral tone of what one may call "polite society"<sup>240</sup> in the post-war decade. As for his earlier plays, they, like his earlier poetry, picture a sense of life, at once sordid and gloomy: *Sweeney Agonistes* is a fragment of Aristophanic melodrama, *Murder in the Cathedral* is a religious tragedy; and *The Family Reunion* is a tragedy on the psychological plane.

Eliot's dramatic genius may be summarized in terms of "three important elements";<sup>241</sup> first, his emphasis on a "dramatic rather than a prose structure",<sup>242</sup> clearly discernible, in *The Waste Land*; second, his preoccupation with the "dramatisation of a consciousness", or the "dramatic realisation of a mind",<sup>243</sup> pictured through *Prufrock*, *The Lady and Gerontion*; and thirdly, his belaboured experiments in evolving out a suitable "dramatic speech",<sup>244</sup> such as the following:—

Death or life or life or death  
Death is life and life is death.

(*Sweeney Agonistes*)

OR

You know and do not know, what it is to act and suffer  
You know and do not know, that acting is suffering.  
And suffering is action.

(*Murder in The Cathedral*)

As a poetic innovator, Eliot starts from the principle that language of poetry must be chosen from ordinary speech. The task of the poet is regulated by "the period in which he finds himself"<sup>245</sup> as also by "his personal constitution."<sup>246</sup> It may be in the nature of either "exploring the musical avenues of a language"<sup>247</sup> or "the catching up with the changes in colloquial speech."<sup>248</sup> The problem of speech, in this way, is

240. *Ibid.*

241. Williams Raymond—*Drama From Ibsen to Eliot*, p. 224.

242. *Ibid.*

243. *Ibid.*

244. *Ibid.*

245. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 35.

246. *Ibid.*

247. *Ibid.*

248. *Ibid.*

fundamentally related to the "changes in thought and sensibility."<sup>249</sup> Eliot feels that the Shakespearian blank verse, which had lost touch with the rhythms of the current speech, will not serve any purpose. Hence, he directs his energies towards the two main problems of dramatic technique: the discovery of "how people of the present day would speak, if they spoke verse";<sup>250</sup> and the realisation of a form to arrest, so to speak, the "flow of spirit at any particular point."<sup>251</sup>

*Sweeney Agonistes* is an experiment more in speech than in form. It is a successful embodiment of Eliot's attempts to order speech and its rhythms. *The Rock*—the critic's next play—is disappointing. The verse therein may be noted for its local effects. But, it is *Murder in the Cathedral* which earns for Eliot an assured place among the writers of verse drama. It has a completeness which springs from the "perfect matching of material and form."<sup>252</sup> The most conspicuous success in the matter of technical perfection comes from the device of the *Chorus*, designed to be recited by the women of Canterbury. The chorus is incorporated by the dramatist for a double purpose: first, like the Greek practice, it could mediate between the action and the audience; second, it could intensify the action by projecting its emotional consequences. Not only does he restore the "full throated chorus of Greek tragedy, but also enlarges its function in the light of the Christian liturgy."<sup>253</sup> Moreover, "chorus is choir—the articulate voice of the body of worshippers."<sup>254</sup> It takes the form of a "link between ritual and believers."<sup>255</sup> As it prays:—

Forgive us, O Lord, We acknowledge ourselves as type of the  
common man

Lord, have mercy upon us  
Christ have mercy upon us.<sup>256</sup>

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249. Eliot, T. S.—*Poetry and Poets*, p. 35.

250. Williams Raymond—*Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, p. 224.

251. *Ibid.*

252. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

253. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 58.

254. Williams Raymond—*Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, p. 228.

255. *Ibid.*

256. Eliot, T. S.—*Murder in the Cathedral*, pp. 87-88.

**Murder in The Cathedral** is not merely a dramatization of the death of Thomas Becket. It exhibits something more. It may be taken as a "deep and searching study of the significance of martyrdoms."<sup>257</sup> The greatest achievement of the play is its dramatic pattern—a pattern which "is the action"<sup>258</sup> and possesses a "formal design and beauty."<sup>259</sup> But it is nowhere imposed or contrived. It is a sort of formal movement, gradually springing through the basic relationships within the ritual. Its dramatic realization is made natural by virtue of three factors: the ritual tradition, and the pre-established affinity among the priests; the choir and the congregation; and third, the familiarity of the formal language, its rhythm and context. It is on account of these qualities that **Murder in the Cathedral** records a plausible achievement of Eliot, as a dramatist. F. O. Matthiessen hails the play as "the most sustained poetic drama in English since **Samson Agonistes**."<sup>260</sup> The sustained action, however, is the resultant accrual of the form itself.

Before we proceed further, it appears necessary to refer to one of the basic features in literary principles of T. S. Eliot. He is never tired of emphasizing the role of tradition. In poetic as well as dramatic practice, he is invariably seeking guidance from the traditional values of the past. He begins with **Sweeney Agonistes** as a Aristophanic melodrama; models **Murder in the Cathedral** on the Greek form; and shapes **The Family Reunion** on the classical myth of Aeschylus. Even in his later plays, though the "borrowings are disguised"; yet he has not hesitated to base his plots on the "models of Greek tragedy."<sup>261</sup>

**The Family Reunion** is an important play in more than one respect: first, it marks Eliot's beginning of adopting Greek material to naturalistic form; and second, it is a drama of "contemporary people speaking contemporary language." Its

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257. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 59.

258. Williams, Raymond—*Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, p. 230.

259. *Ibid.*

260. Matthiessen, F. O.—*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 176.

261. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 88.

setting and scenes are the familiar drawing rooms of naturalism. Its versification contains "firm yet infinitely flexible rhythms"—a distinctive feature which assumes the form of regular medium in all his subsequent play-writing. E. Martin Browne feels that "of the modern plays, **The Family Reunion** is the one which has most lasting value."<sup>262</sup>

Eliot's last plays may be said to have been developed through his serious concern with the nature of society and culture he has dealt in **The Idea of a Christian Society** and the **Notes towards the Definition of Culture**. They are the outcome of the same mood which sprouted the poetry of **Four Quartets**. He attempts through these plays to project life and its problems in the background of his own experiences which he had acquired in multifarious vocations. In one way, they may be regarded as "foot-notes or exemplars",<sup>263</sup> to **Four Quartets**. The most striking merit of these plays is their "speakability."<sup>264</sup> Helen Gardner's final remarks are significant:—

"Eliot's desire to create a transpicuous language as a vehicle for drama was fulfilled in what is best described as the heightened speech of these plays."<sup>265</sup>

Eliot's dramatic theory and practice has already processed a valuable phase in the revival of modern poetic drama. It is no mean achievement that he has sent drama back to its origins, inside the church. He has also pushed it forward to the commercial theatre. Irrespective of the fact, that some of his plays have been utter failures, Eliot's work is assured of a "permanent place in dramatic literature."<sup>266</sup> As to the general merit of his plays, we would like to close our assessment with the significant observations made by Bonamy Dobree:—

"Their linking of the modern world with Greek tragedy is in itself of major importance—more than a mere matter of tradition. It is part of the statement that Eliot was constantly

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262. Browne, E. Martin—*T. S. Eliot in the Theatre*, C. F. Eliot—*The Man and His Work*, p. 125.

263. Gardner, Helen—*The Comedies of T. S. Eliot*, C. F. Eliot—*The Man and His Work*, p. 162.

264. *Ibid*, p. 181.

265. *Ibid*.

266. Jones, D. E.—*The Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 215.



making as to the unchangeability of human nature and its problems. They are universal. Again, they are extremely actable, holding audiences as being based on contemporary actuality. In the end, Eliot evolved a masterly model of stage speech, telling to the hearers and easy for actors to say."<sup>267</sup>

In the end, we may conclude that Eliot's critical writings numerous and prolific as they are, have certainly cultivated a new method, a new taste, and a new standard in English criticism. The *New Criticism* and the *New Poetry* owe much to his endeavours. In theory, he can genuinely claim to have expanded the dimensions of literary criticism. In practice, he has restored "health to the language";<sup>268</sup> and has brought the "poet back to life."<sup>269</sup> In the totality of his efforts, Eliot may be said to have moved between the two important facets of literary criticism: "What is Poetry?"<sup>270</sup> and "Is this a good poem?"<sup>271</sup> The key to his literary achievements lies in the basic fact, that he not only understood but demonstrated also, the "relationship of life and letters in our time."<sup>272</sup> Perhaps, what he spoke of Yeats, in 1940, is true of Eliot also:—

"He was one of those few, whose history is the history of their own time, who are part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them. This is a very high position to assign to him: but I believe that it is one which is secure."<sup>273</sup>

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267. Dobree Bonamy—*A Personal Reminiscence*, C. F.—T. S. Eliot: *The Man and His Work*, p. 84.

268. *Selected Prose*, p. 65.

269. *Selected Essays*, p. 278.

270. Eliot, T. S.—U.P.U.C., Introduction, p. 16.

271. *Ibid.*

272. Hayward, John—*Selected Prose*, Introduction, p. 13.

273. Eliot, T. S.—*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 262.

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